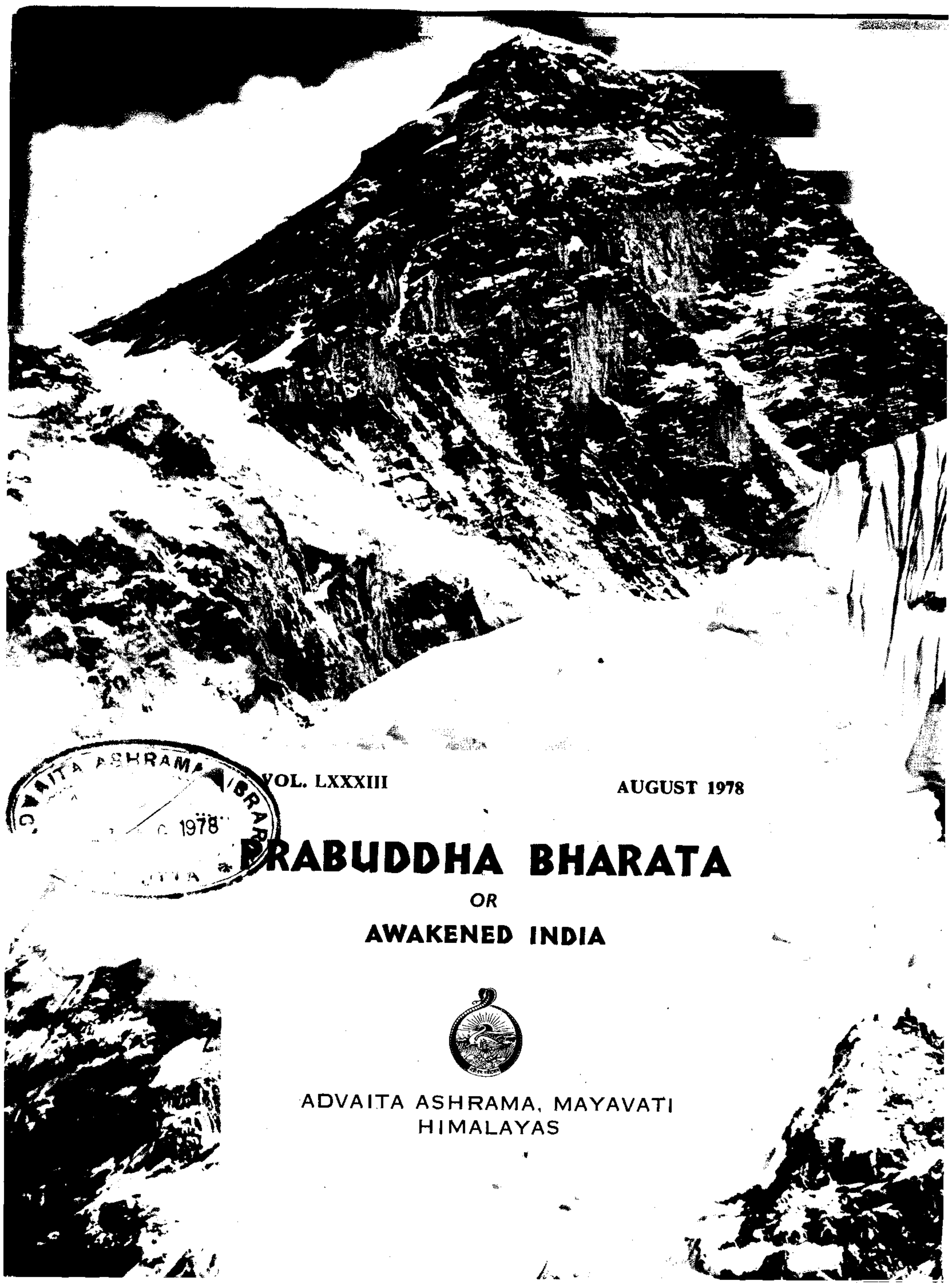




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Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. LXXXIII

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No. 8

Arise ! Awake ! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

TEACHINGS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA *

श्रीरामकृष्णोपदेशावलिः ।*

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

यथा विलिप्ते तु रसैः प्रकाशते

काचस्य पृष्ठे प्रतिरूपसंचयः ।

हृल्लस्यशुक्ले च तथोर्ध्वरेतसा-

मादर्शवत् सर्वविभुः प्रकाशते ॥१॥

1. Just as glass smeared on one side with mercury reflects the image of the object put before it ; so the mirrorlike heart of a chaste person, whose sexual energy is well restrained, reflects the all-pervading Reality.

बाष्पालोका यथैवेह पुरवर्त्मगृहादिकम् ।

नानारुग्भिर्द्योतयन्ति ह्येककोशात् समागताः ॥२॥

नानाजातिकुलोद्भूता अवतारास्तथा भृशम् ।

सर्वान् देशान् भासयन्ति ह्यद्वयेणात् समागताः ॥३॥

2 & 3. As the gas coming from a common storehouse lights the lamps of various intensities in the streets and houses of the town ; similarly, the Incarnations, although taking their birth in different castes and families, illumine the people of all countries, as they all originate from the one-without-a-second Reality.

* See *Vidyodaya* (a critical Sanskrit monthly journal), Ed. Hrishikesh Sastri, Bhatpara (24-Parganas, West Bengal) : The Oriental Nobility Institute, January 1897, pp. 11-16. The versified Sanskrit rendering is by Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The English translation is ours,

ACARYA SANKARA THROUGH HIS GITA-COMMENTARY—II

(EDITORIAL)

In the first instalment of this Editorial, Ācārya Śaṅkara's views regarding Karma were reviewed in brief. Thereby it was shown that the Ācārya is liberal enough to accept the need and utility of the Karma-Kāṇḍa as well as Karma-Yoga for the spiritual evolution of the aspirant. It was also seen that he is not so fanatic, as he is usually thought to be, about the renunciation of work (*Karma-sannyāsa*) for one who has attained the necessary purification and fitness for knowledge (*jñāna-niṣṭhā-yogyatā*) through Karma-Yoga. In addition, his broad definition of religion, and the acceptance of dualism in the early stages of spiritual evolution, was also discussed before. Thus becomes revealed Śaṅkara's large-heartedness through his commentary on the *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā*. In this instalment, the Ācārya's views regarding the other Yogas and some related topics of the Vedānta philosophy, will be briefly studied in the light of his *Gītā*-commentary to get a glimpse of his magnanimous personality.

Yoga as a Path to Liberation:

What is usually known as Rāja-Yoga or simply Yoga, has been termed in the *Gītā* as Dhyāna-Yoga. Sri Ramakrishna has called the same as Mano-Yoga. Ācārya Śaṅkara is of the opinion that Karma-Yoga performed without any attachment to the fruits of actions (*niṣkāma-karma*) is the external means (*bahirāṅga sādhana*) for becoming established in Dhyāna-Yoga.²⁰

20. See *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā* with Śaṅkara's commentary and Hindi translation, Gorakhpur : Gita Press, seventh edition (hereafter *Gītā-Bhāṣya*), VI, 3, p. 173 ; the original Sanskrit version reads : ध्यानयोगस्य फलनिरपेक्षः कर्मयोगो बहिरङ्गं साधनम् . . . ।

The state in which an aspirant becomes established in Dhyāna-Yoga has been called in the *Gītā* by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa the Yogārūḍha state. The same state has also been termed by the Ācārya in his commentary as : *sattvaśuddhi, sāmyak-jñāna-prāpti* or *jñāna-niṣṭhā-yogyatā*. According to Śaṅkara, it is quite essential for a Karma-Yogī to practise Dhyāna-Yoga (meditation or *upāsana*) side by side with his doing Karma in the right spirit if he wants to become a Yogārūḍha ; and till one becomes established in this state, Karma-Yoga is a must.²¹ As a matter of fact, Karma becomes 'Karma-Yoga' only when it is coupled with 'Yoga' (meditation). Truly speaking, it is this Yoga in Karma-Yoga which gives it the status of worship. Unless work is done with a worshipful attitude, it can never be worship. To those who misunderstood this spirit of Karma-Yoga taught by Swami Vivekananda and thought mere Karma (*kevalam karma*) as worship, Swami Brahmananda would say, 'Work and worship' ; that is, work and meditate. The Swami explained to them in what sense Swamiji meant 'work is worship'. Work coupled with meditation is the only way to become Yogārūḍha—established in Yoga. Śaṅkara says : 'No worker (Karmī) who has not given up attachment to the fruits of actions ever becomes a Yogī, for the mind of such a man can never become established in meditation (*samādhi*), as aspiration for the fruits is always the cause of mental digressions. Therefore, a worker who renounces the fruits of action becomes

21. See *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, VI, Introduction, p. 167 ; the original reads : तत्र ध्यानयोगस्य बहिरङ्गं कर्म इति यावद् ध्यानयोगारोहणासमर्थः तावद् गृहस्थेन अधिकृतेन कर्तव्यं कर्म इति . . . ।

a Yogī.²² It is true; unless an aspirant achieves at least some capacity of meditation and the power to maintain the equilibrium of the mind, he cannot be called a Yogī. Śaṅkara is of the opinion that Karma alone (*kevalam karma*) cannot enable an aspirant to attain such a state; for that, Karma coupled with Yoga is necessary.

One who has thus become Yogārūḍha, that is, become fit for the life of pure meditation, dives deeper and deeper into his own Reality and ultimately attains Nirvikalpa Samādhi, and is thus liberated. About this, Śaṅkara says in his commentary on verse fifteen of the sixth chapter: 'By practising meditation in this way the Yogī whose mind has come under his control attains Nirvāṇa or liberation—the ultimate Peace which is in Me (the Reality).'²³ Hereby the Ācārya has told that the ultimate goal of Yoga is liberation.

Bhakti-Yoga as a Way to Liberation:

Like Karma-Yoga and Rāja-Yoga, Śaṅ-

22. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, VI, 2, p. 172; the original reads: न हि यस्माद् असंन्यस्तसंकल्पः असंन्यस्तः अपरित्यक्तः फलविषयः संकल्पः अभिसंधिः येन सः असंन्यस्तसंकल्पः, कश्चन कश्चिदपि कर्मी योगी समाधानवान् भवति, न संभवति इत्यर्थः । फलसंकल्पस्य चित्तविक्षेपहेतुत्वात् । तस्माद् यः कश्चन कर्मी संन्यस्तफलसंकल्पो भवेत् स योगी समाधानवान् अविक्षिप्तचित्तो भवेत् चित्तविक्षेपहेतोः फलसंकल्पस्य संन्यस्तत्वाद् इति अभिप्रायः ।

23. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, VI, 15, p. 181; the original reads: अथ इदानीं योगफलम् उच्यते—युञ्जन् समाधानं कुर्वन् एवं यथोक्तेन विधानेन सदा आत्मानं योगी नियतमानसो नियतं संयतं मानसं मनो यस्यः सः अयं नियतमानसः, शान्तिम् उपरतिं निर्वाणपरमां निर्वाणं मोक्षः तत्परमा निष्ठा यस्याः शान्तेः सा निर्वाणपरमा तां निर्वाणपरमां मत्संस्थां मदधीनाम् अधिगच्छति प्राप्नोति ।

kara also recognizes Bhakti-Yoga as a path to spiritual liberation. While commenting on verse thirteen of the ninth chapter he says: 'those endowed with faith, who have taken recourse to Bhakti (devotion) as a path to liberation, . . .'²⁴ This utterance of the Ācārya is enough to show that he accepts Bhakti-Yoga as a means to liberation.

According to Śaṅkara, there are two ways in which a devotee (Bhakta) may attain liberation, depending upon his competency. The aspirant of the first category attains the Yogārūḍha state through Karma-Yoga, and thereby becomes fit for higher knowledge and acquires the capacity for deeper meditation. After practising Dhyāna-Yoga for some period, he becomes established in higher knowledge (*jñāna-niṣṭhā*). In this state the aspirant naturally becomes blessed with the higher type of devotion known as Parā-Bhakti which ultimately results in his liberation. This sequence of spiritual evolution has been told by Lord Kṛṣṇa in verses forty-five to fifty-five of the eighteenth chapter, and supported by Śaṅkara in his commentary on these verses.²⁵

The aspirant of the other category, instead of following the path of Karma-Yoga prescribed by the Śrutis and the Smṛtis, practises the disciplines according to the Kriya-Yoga of the Bhakti Śāstras. In such aspirants the faculty of feeling is more predominant than that of willing and thinking. According to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the devotional practises are of nine types; namely, 'to hear the names, praises and stories of Lord Viṣṇu, to chant them, to remember Him, to wait upon Him, to offer worship and salutation to Him, to dedicate one's actions to Him, to cultivate

24. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, IX, 13, p. 234; the original reads: ये पुनः श्रद्धधाना भगवद्भक्तिलक्षणे मोक्षमार्गे प्रवृत्ताः—

25. See *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, XVIII, 45-55, pp. 437-54.

friendship with Him, and to offer one's all to Him.²⁶ Ācārya Śaṅkara does not condemn such disciplines, rather he says in his commentary on the twenty-sixth verse of the ninth chapter : 'Not only do my devotees attain the infinite result in the form of not returning to this world, that is, liberation ; but it is also easy for them to worship me.'²⁷ In this verse, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna : 'When one offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water,—that I eat, offered with devotion by the pure-minded.'²⁸ From his commentary it is clearly revealed that Śaṅkara accepts this dualistic practice of devotion without any hesitation. According to him, the aspirant of this category is also blessed with higher knowledge later on, when he attains the due purification through his one-pointed devotion. In his commentary on verses ten and eleven of the tenth chapter, the Ācārya says : 'To them who are ever devout, worshipping Me, not for any purpose of their own, but out of love for Me—I give higher knowledge (Buddhi-Yoga) of My essential nature by which they . . . know Me, the Supreme Lord, the Self, as their own self. . . . I dwell in their internal organ (*antahkaraṇa*) which is engaged in thinking of the Self alone, and destroy the darkness of ignorance, that illusory knowledge caused by the absence of discrimination, by the lamp of wisdom, . . .'²⁹

26. See *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, VII, v. 23.

27. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, IX, 26, p. 240 ; the original reads : न केवलं मद्भक्तानाम् अनावृत्तिलक्षणम् अनन्तफलं सुखाराधनः च ।

28. *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā*, IX, 26.

29. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, X, 10-11, p. 249 ; the original reads : तेषां सततयुक्तानां नित्याभियुक्तानां निवृत्त-सर्वबाह्यैषणानां भजतां सेवमानानाम्, किम् अर्थित्वादिना कारणेन, न इति आह, प्रीतिपूर्वकं प्रीतिः स्नेहः तत्पूर्वकं मां भजताम् इत्यर्थः । ददामि प्रयच्छामि बुद्धियोगं बुद्धिः सम्यग्दर्शनं मत्तत्त्वविषयं तेन योगो

Śaṅkara points out in his commentary on the thirteenth verse of the twelfth chapter that the devotee of the first category attains liberation independently by virtue of his spiritual practices and competency, and the Lord Kṛṣṇa has also said the same thing in the fourth verse of the same chapter thus : 'they reach only Myself' ; while the devotees of the second category are dependent upon the Lord for their liberation. That is why the Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the seventh verse of the same chapter, 'To those whose mind is set on Me, verily, I become ere long, O son of Prthā, the Saviour out of the ocean of the mortal world.'³⁰ Whether a devotee is dependent on the Lord for his liberation or attains it independently, the Ācārya means to say that the devotees of both the categories attain liberation ultimately.

Śaṅkara's Acceptance of Dualism :

From the above discussion, it is evident that Śaṅkara accepted with an open heart the necessity of the preliminary dualistic disciplines of Bhakti-Yoga for the purification of the aspirant's mind. He did not object to dualism as such, so long as it was taken as a step for one's spiritual evolution, and not the goal of life. Throughout his commentary on the *Gītā*, he is never seen to condemn dualism outright, like a dead mouse. For instance, his very

बुद्धियोगः, तं बुद्धियोगम् । येन बुद्धियोगेन सम्यग्दर्शन-लक्षणेन मां परमेश्वरम् आत्मभूतम् आत्मत्वेन उपयान्ति प्रतिपद्यन्ते । . . . अहं अज्ञानजम् अविवेकतो जातं मिथ्याप्रत्ययलक्षणं मोहान्धकारं तमो नाशयामि आत्म-भावस्थ आत्मनो भावः अन्तःकरणाशयः तस्मिन् एव स्थितः सन् ।

30. See *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, XII, 13, p. 292 ; the original reads : 'ते प्राप्नुवन्ति मामेव' इति अक्षरोपासकानां कैवल्यप्राप्तौ स्वातन्त्र्यम् उक्त्वा इतरेषां पारतन्त्र्यम् ईश्वराधीनतां दर्शितवान् 'तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता' इति ।

definition of *upāsanā* given in the commentary on the third verse of the twelfth chapter (and also in his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, I. iii. 9) is dualistic. It reads : 'Meditation (*upāsanā*) consists in approaching the meditated (*upāsya*) by *objectifying* it through meditation according to the teaching of the scriptures and dwelling for a long time steadily in the same thought-current like a thread of descending oil.'³¹ Meditation, which Śaṅkara means hereby, has the meditator and the meditated existing separately, at least till the higher non-dualistic stage is achieved. He had no objection if anybody meditated on the qualified Brahman taking it as the object, or on the abstract Reality. This shows that he accepted the Reality in all its aspects like a normal Advaitist. His tolerance of dualism is seen throughout his *Gītā*-commentary in some form or the other. Nowhere is there any evidence therein to show that he did not accept the Reality in its qualified aspect, with or without form ; and later on it will be seen that he not only accepted the Incarnation, but recognized His worship as a path to liberation. This surely reveals the magnanimity of the oft-misunderstood heart of the Ācārya.

Qualified Non-dualism and Śaṅkara :

The qualified non-dualists regard the world and the individual souls (Jīvas) as the parts of the Supreme Lord. The fact that Śaṅkara has no objection to this view is clear from a discussion raised by him in his commentary on the seventh verse of the fifteenth chapter. For instance, a die-hard Advaitist may raise an objection :

31. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, XII, 3, p. 287 ; the original reads : उपासनं नाम यथाशास्त्रम् उपास्यस्य अर्थस्य विषयीकरणेन सामीप्यम् उपगम्य तैलधारावत् समान-प्रत्ययप्रवाहेण दीर्घकालं यद् आसनं तद् उपासनम् आचक्षते ।

'How can there be a portion of the Supreme Self who has no parts? If He has parts, He would be liable to destruction on the separation of the parts.' To this Śaṅkara answers : 'It does not matter ; because it is only a portion limited by the *upādhi* (association) set up by ignorance ; it is an imaginary portion as it were. This truth has been established in the thirteenth chapter.'³² From this it is clear that in whatever way Śaṅkara may have interpreted the view, he did not condemn it like a chronic Advaitist. In this respect the Ācārya has kept the tradition of his guru's guru, Gaudapāda, who wrote in his *Māṇḍukya Kārikā* : 'The dualists are confirmed believers in the methodologies, establishing their own views, and are at loggerheads with one another. But this (non-dualist) view finds no conflict with them.'³³ Of course, the hardshell non-dualists antagonize because they have not yet understood the all-embracing nature of non-dualism.

The liberal attitude of Śaṅkara towards dualism and qualified non-dualism shows that he too like Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda believed that they are non-dualists antagonize because they have gradual spiritual evolution of an aspirant. He might not have openly propagated this view, because in his times it was not so necessary.

Avatāra and His Worship :

It was told before that the speciality of

32. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, XV, 7, p. 370-71 ; the original reads : ननु निरवयवस्य परमात्मनः कुतः अवयव एकदेशः अंश इति । सावयवत्वे च विनाशप्रसङ्गः अवयवविभागात् ।

न एष दोषः अविद्याकृतोपाधिपरिच्छिन्न एकदेशः अंश इव कल्पितो यतः । दर्शितः च अयम् अर्थः क्षेत्राध्याये विस्तरशः ।

33. *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad with Gaudapāda's Kārikā*, III, 17.

the *Gītā* lies in the fact that the Supreme Truth has been told therein through the personality of the Avatāra (Incarnation), whom Śaṅkara calls: '*Vāsudevākhyam param brahma*—the Supreme Brahman of the name Vāsudeva'. This is contradictory to the belief that 'the men of knowledge do not believe in the Avatāra.' Of course, men of raw knowledge may not; but men of genuine knowledge like Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śaṅkara do believe in the Avatāra, although they may differ in their interpretation of its concept. Śaṅkara's Introduction to the *Gītā* is direct evidence of this fact. If anyone studies his conception of the Avatāra in the Introduction, one may for a moment mistake him for a dualist or a qualified non-dualist. His following expressions in the Introduction are worth noting: 'Nārāyaṇa is beyond the unmanifested (Avyaka). From the unmanifested the egg of this mundane universe, within which are these worlds and the earth with its seven continents, is born.'³⁴ Here Śaṅkara is seen to accept the Paurāṇic dualistic conception about the creation. He further says: 'The Lord created this universe, and wishing to preserve it, created the Prajāpatis first; . . . Then he created Sanaka, Sanandana and others, . . . The Creator Lord Viṣṇu known as Nārāyaṇa, wishing to maintain order in this universe, incarnated Himself as Kṛṣṇa, being born as a son to Devakī and Vāsudeva; . . . The Lord, always possessed of knowledge, supremacy, power, strength, might and vigour, controls Māyā—which is His own power, the primordial cause of this universe, composed of three *guṇas*. He appears to the world as if He is born, embodied and

acting as the Saviour of people. In reality, He is unborn, pure, intelligent and free.'³⁵

From these statements, Śaṅkara's concept of the Avatāra becomes evident. The whole narration sounds like that of a dualistic devotee, but for his use of the word 'as if (*iva*)', which makes one feel that Śaṅkara did not accept the Avatārahood of God wholeheartedly. It is, however, not right to say so. Had he really meant it, he would not have said, '*Vāsudevākhyam param brahma*—the Supreme Brahman called Vāsudeva.' All he means to say by the term 'as if (*iva*)' is that, just as the role enacted by an actor is not the real nature of his personality, similarly, the role enacted by the Reality in the form of an Avatāra is not His real nature. The Reality is eternal (*nitya*), unborn (*aja*), immortal (*amṛta*), unchanging (*avyaya*), free (*mukta*) and so on, while an Avatāra does not seem to have all these qualities. If the personality of an Avatāra, as it is, is taken as real, then God would be a finite being subject to birth, death, change and bondage; but such can never be the real nature of God. Even Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*: 'He who knows My divine birth and action in principle' (IV. 9); 'The foolish regard Me, the unmanifested, as come into manifestation, not knowing My supreme state—immutable and transcendental' (VII. 24); 'Unaware of

35. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, Introduction, pp. 13-14; the original reads: स भगवान् सृष्ट्वा इदं जगत् तस्य च स्थितिं चिकीर्षुः मरीच्यादिन् अग्रे सृष्ट्वा प्रजापतीन् . . . । ततः अन्यान् च सनकसनन्दनादीन् उत्पाद्य, . . . स आदिकर्ता नारायणाख्यो विष्णुः . . . देवक्यां वसुदेवात् अंशेन कृष्णः किल संबभूव । . . .

34. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, Introduction, p. 13; the original reads: ॐ नारायणः परोऽव्यक्तादण्डमव्यक्तसंभवम् । अण्डस्यान्तस्त्वमे लोकाः सप्तद्वीपा च मेदिनी ।

स च भगवान् ज्ञानैश्वर्यशक्तिबलवीर्यतेजोभिः सदा संपन्नः, त्रिगुणात्मिकां वैष्णवीं स्वां मायां मूलप्रकृतिं बशीकृत्य, अजः अव्ययो भूतानाम् ईश्वरो नित्यशुद्धबुद्धमुक्तस्वभावः अपि सन्, स्वमायया देहवान् इव, जात इव च लोकानुग्रहं कुर्वन् इव लक्ष्यते ।

My higher state, as the great Lord of beings, fools disregard Me, dwelling in the human form' (IX. 11); and so on. It is to impress the real nature of an Avatāra on the mind of the readers that Śaṅkara has used the word 'as if (*iva*)'. The word will naturally help the aspirant to focus his attention on the Reality behind the personality of the Avatāra, and help him in worshipping Him with knowledgeable devotion. When the Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself says that His real nature is not as it appears to ordinary men, but something higher—the Reality, the Principle—, then if Śaṅkara says so what is wrong therein?

Avatāra-Worship as a Way to Liberation:

Not only does Ācārya Śaṅkara accept the Avatāra, but recognizes the fact that the worship of an Avatāra in the right spirit leads to liberation. In his commentary on verse ten of the fourth chapter he says: 'This path [Avatāra-worship] to liberation is not a recent invention, it was in vogue even in ancient times.'³⁶ This clearly indicates the liberality of the Ācārya.

Jñāna-Yoga as a Way to Liberation:

As an exponent of the Advaita view, Śaṅkara naturally believes that Jñāna-Yoga leads one to liberation. In his commentary on the first verse of the ninth chapter he clearly says: 'This right knowledge alone, and none else, is the direct means for attaining liberation as declared in the Śruti and the Smṛtis. . . . On attaining this knowledge you will be liberated from the bondage of the world (*samsāra*).'³⁷ If Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Gītā*, *Upaniṣads* and the

Brahma-Sūtras is studied critically, it will be revealed that he emphasizes this point whenever he gets an opportunity to do so, because that is the main teaching of all the *Upaniṣads*.

Harmony of the Yogas and the Upaniṣads:

Some scholars may argue that if it is admitted that the Yogas of Karma, Bhakti and Rāja as well as the Avatāra-worship lead to liberation, it contradicts the view of the scriptures, in which it is repeatedly said: 'Liberation is possible by knowledge alone';³⁸ 'By knowing Him alone one goes beyond death, there is no other way';³⁹ and so on. So whatever is said by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* and by the Ācārya is against the teaching of the *Upaniṣads*. Moreover, their statements go against the realizations of the wise men and reason as well. It is a matter of common sense that ignorance being the root cause of bondage, it can be got rid of by knowledge alone, and by no other means. The experience of all the wise men who have attained liberation is a strong proof of this. Therefore, because the teaching, 'all Yogas—Karma, Bhakti and Rāja, and also Avatāra-worship—lead to liberation,' goes against the scriptures (*Śruti*), reason (*yukti*), and the experience of the wise (*anubhūti*), it is not acceptable.

In reply it may be said that although the concept that 'all Yogas lead to liberation' upheld by Lord Kṛṣṇa and Ācārya Śaṅkara appears contradictory to the stronger Śruti statements, reason and the experience of the wise men, it is actually not so; because both Lord Kṛṣṇa and Śaṅkara are of

³⁶. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, IV, 10, p. 109; the original reads: न एष मोक्षमार्ग इदानीं प्रवृत्तः, किं तर्हि पूर्वम् अपि—

³⁷. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, IX, 1, p. 226; the original reads: इदम् एव सम्यग्ज्ञानं साक्षाद् मोक्षप्राप्ति-

साधनम् . . . इत्यादि श्रुतिस्मृतिभ्यः । न अन्यत् । . . . यद् ज्ञानं ज्ञात्वा प्राप्य मोक्षसे अशुभात् संसार-बन्धनात् ।

³⁸. 'ज्ञानादेव तु कैवल्यम्' ।

³⁹. *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad*, VI, 15.

the opinion that all the above-mentioned Yogas and the Avatāra-worship ultimately culminate in 'knowledge' which in turn dispels ignorance and liberates the aspirant. When they preach the harmony of the Yogas they mean it in this way. This will be clear from their statements quoted below.

Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* : 'All action [Karma] in its entirety, O Pārtha, attains its consummation in knowledge' (IV. 33); 'With the heart concentrated by Yoga, with the eye of evenness for all beings, he beholds the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self' (VI. 29); 'By devotion [Bhakti] he knows Me in reality, what and who I am; then having known Me in reality, he forthwith enters into Me' (XVIII. 55). Hereby, Lord Kṛṣṇa has clearly pointed out that the Yogas of Karma, Dhyāna and Bhakti ultimately lead to the knowledge of Reality; and this knowledge in turn liberates the aspirant from bondage by dispelling his ignorance.

Through his *Gītā*-commentary, Śaṅkara also has pointed out the same truth. For instance : 'All actions ultimately culminate in knowledge which is the means for liberation.'⁴⁰ 'Practise Karma-Yoga which is the means for right knowledge.'⁴¹ 'Now is being described the ultimate culmination of Yoga, which is the perception of oneness with Brahman, and the cause of cessation of worldly bondage.'⁴² 'By Bhakti, he knows Me as I am, . . . He knows Me to be non-dual, the one Con-

sciousness, pure and simple, unborn, undecaying, undying, fearless, deathless. Thus knowing Me in truth, he enters into Myself immediately after attaining knowledge.'⁴³ These statements of Ācārya Śaṅkara are enough to show that he is of the opinion that the Yogas of Karma, Dhyāna and Bhakti ultimately lead to 'knowledge', and the knowledge thus gained liberates the aspirant.

Thus we see that both Lord Kṛṣṇa and Ācārya Śaṅkara have not said anything contradictory to the *Śruti*, *yukti* or *anubhūti*. How can they? They did not come to destroy, but to fulfil. In the *Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa has preached the harmony of the Yogas and the Ācārya has shown wholehearted acceptance of the same through his commentary. Moreover, Lord Kṛṣṇa has expressed the dualistic, qualified non-dualistic and non-dualistic views in the *Gītā*, and Śaṅkara has treated them very liberally in his commentary, thereby keeping the tradition of his gurus, who believed that 'Advaita has no quarrel with any other school of thought.' He was not a hyper-Advaitist, but a real Advaitist, so much so that when Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* that women, Vaiśyas, as well as Śūdras—even they attain to the Supreme Goal,⁴⁴ the Ācārya does not write a long commentary to refute or torture it—the rejuvenator of Vedic religion though he was.

In this way, the Ācārya's *Gītā*-commentary clearly reveals the magnanimity of his heart. Although a staunch Advaitist, we do not find in his life any allergy to idol

40. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, IV, 33, p. 135; the original reads : सर्वं कर्म समस्तम् अखिलम् अप्रतिबद्धं पार्थ ज्ञाने मोक्षसाधने . . . अन्तर्भवति इत्यर्थः ।

41. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, IV, 42, p. 141; the original reads : योगं सम्यग्दर्शनोपायकर्मानुष्ठानम् आतिष्ठ कुरु इत्यर्थः ।

42. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, VI, 29, p. 187; the original reads : इदानीं योगस्य यत् फलं ब्रह्मैकत्वदर्शनं सर्व-संसारविच्छेदकारणं तत् प्रदर्शयते ।

43. *Gītā-Bhāṣya*, XVIII, 55, p. 452; the original reads : भक्त्या माम् अभिजानाति यावान् अहम् उपाधिकृतविस्तरभेदो यः च अहं विध्वस्तसर्वोपाधिभेद उत्तमपुरुष आकाशकल्पः तं माम् अद्वैतं चैतन्यमात्रैक-रसम् अजम् अजरम् अमरम् अभयम् अनिघनं तत्त्वतः अभिजानाति ।

44. *Śrīmad-Bhagavad -Gītā*, IX, 32.

worship, or the worship of the Divine Mother, or condemnation for any gods or goddesses. His broad heart had place for all. That is why Swami Vivekananda

called him a 'great man', his works 'noble works' and his life a 'noble life'.

(Concluded)

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA AGHORAMANI DEVI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

It happened in the spring of 1885.¹ One early morning while the old Brahmin woman was telling her beads in her living room, overlooking the Ganges, she was wonder-struck by a vision of Sri Ramakrishna, with his right fist half-clenched in the typical posture of baby Gopala. She was visibly moved, and noticed the baby Gopala fixing his beautiful eyes on her and smiling. As she tried to catch hold of his fist the form of Sri Ramakrishna melted, and therefrom emerged a baby, about ten months old, as though of flesh and blood. Strangely, the baby crawled forward lifting one of his fists, and approaching the old woman said, 'Mother, get me cream.' Wild with joy she shouted, but soon thereafter recomposed herself and pleaded her inability to feed him with butter, cheese or cream. This could hardly pacify the baby.

It repeatedly begged of her some food. Finding no escape she took out from an earthen pot hung from the roof some stale coconut balls, all she had in stock, and gave the baby to eat. Gopala was happy, and avidly partook of the sweetmeat. Although she could temporarily satisfy Gopala, she could not proceed with her usual spiritual practices, for the baby Gopala, restless as he was, now would spring on her shoulder, now would sit on her lap and snatch away her rosary, and the very next moment would romp about in the room. This vivid experience overwhelmed her. As soon as the day broke she hastened to the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, holding the baby Gopala close to her heart; his head rested on her shoulder and his beautiful rose-red feet kept dangling upon her breast. Approaching Sri Ramakrishna's living room at Dakshineswar she shouted, 'Gopala ! Gopala !' She used to worship God in Ramakrishna as baby Gopala, as did mother Yashoda.

In a dazed condition she arrived there, looking like a mad woman, her hair dishevelled, the end of her sari trailing on the ground. Taking no notice of Golap-Ma,² who was tidying Sri Ramakrishna's room,

1. Swami Saradananda in his *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (trans. Swami Jagadananda, Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970, [hereafter *Great Master*], p. 633), writes, 'When we saw her first with the Master at Dakshineswar in the month of March or April in 1885, she had been visiting the Master for about six months. . . .' She met Sri Ramakrishna first in November-December 1884. Sister Devamata, on the authority of Swami Ramakrishnananda, mentioned 1884 as the year of her first visit to Sri Ramakrishna. Therefore the said incident took place in March-April 1885 and not 1884 as mentioned in the *Great Master*, p. 639.

2. Golap-Ma was a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and later a member of Holy Mother's household in Calcutta.

she entered into the room and took her seat near Sri Ramakrishna. Forty-eight-year-old Sri Ramakrishna too, over-powered by spiritual ecstasy readily sat on her lap. With a radiance of joy on her face she fed Sri Ramakrishna with the food she had brought. Tears of joy rolled down her cheeks. Soon afterwards Sri Ramakrishna came back to the normal plane of consciousness and returned to his seat on the small cot. On the other hand the Brahmin woman, overwhelmed with joy, began dancing and singing, 'Brahma dances, Vishnu dances,' etc. As soon as she could gain control over herself she declared that the divine baby Gopala was passing between them, now entering into Sri Ramakrishna's body, now sitting on her lap and playing with her. While her divine ecstasy continued Sri Ramakrishna eulogized her spiritual attainments and fed her sumptuously. However, he pacified her before he allowed her to leave for Kamarhati in the late afternoon. From that day Sri Ramakrishna began to address her as 'Gopaler Ma' (Gopala's Mother).

A few months before this drama was enacted this pious Brahmin woman, Aghoramani by name, had met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar for the first time. It was the Bengali month Agrahayana (November-December) of 1884. Aghoramani was more than sixty years of age. She had come from Kamarhati, about three miles from Dakshineswar, by boat, accompanied by the widow of her landlord, Govinda Chandra Datta, and one of her distant relations, Kamini by name. She was married at the age of nine to a family at Paighata, Bodra, in 24-Parganas district. Widowed while still a girl, Aghoramani following her natural propensities, dedicated herself entirely to spiritual pursuits, for she was born a docile child with spiritual hunger in her soul. Regular religious observances and strict disciplines apart, she lived the sheltered life of a Brahmin widow, wor-

shipping Gopala, the baby Krishna, according to the Vatsalya attitude of the Bhakti cult. Here God as the divine Child is regarded as completely dependent on the devotee, much as a child to a parent. Initiated with the 'Gopala' Mantra she gradually learnt the art of loving God as her own child, and through this she was able to satiate her unassuaged maternal love. She cooked for Him, fed Him, bathed Him and played with Him. Catering to the daily needs of the baby Gopala she forgot her own wants and eventually developed a selfless love for God. Devoted to the practice of religious piety, strict austerities and Brahmacharya, she was a typical orthodox Brahmin. As sister of Nilmadhav Bandyopadhyaya, priest of the temple of Govinda Chandra Datta, she was well acquainted with the members of the Datta family, particularly Govinda Chandra Datta's widow. She could secure a small room in the southern end of the temple garden, and in this bare room she lived more than thirty years before she met Sri Ramakrishna, longing ardently for realization of God. She had to pass her days through great hardships,³ so much so that sometimes she had to earn her living by selling sacred thread spun by her with the help of a spindle. But no hardship, come what may, could discourage her from her daily practices. Hour after hour, day after day and sometimes day and night together she devoted herself over her rosary, deeply absorbed. Writes one biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, 'Lest her telling of beads get disrupted she used to use her left hand for cooking while her right hand remained busy

3. The landed property she inherited from her husband was sold out at Rs. 300/-. It was invested and she earned a monthly interest of about Rs. 3/-. See Swami Nirlepananda, *Ramakrishna Sāradāmṛta* [Bengali], p. 46 and 49; and also *Udbodhan* (Bengali organ of the Ramakrishna Order), Calcutta: Udbodhan Office Asvin, B.S. 1346, p. 567.

with her rosary.⁴ Pathos and tenderness, aches and ecstasies of her motherly loving heart were her only companions over all these years. Her continuous yearning over thirty years reminds one of Sabari of the *Ramayana*.

As far as her personal life went, there could have been little difference, if any, between this time and the time when Sister Nivedita visited her place one evening in 1898. Sister Nivedita writes, 'And how beautiful seemed the long flight of steps rising out of the water, and leading up, through its lofty bathing-ghat, past the terraced lawn, to the cloister-like veranda on the right, where, in a little room—built probably in the first place for some servant of the great house at its side—Gopaler Ma had lived and told her beads, for many a year. . . . And her own little room was absolutely without comforts. Her bed was of stone, and her floor of stone, and the piece of matting she offered her guests to sit on, had to be taken down from a shelf and unrolled. The handful of parched rice and sugar-candy that formed her only store, and were all that she could give in hospitality, were taken from an earthen pot that hung from the roof by a few cords. But the place was spotlessly clean, washed constantly by Ganges-water of her own sturdy carrying. And in a niche near her hand lay an old copy of the *Ramayana*. . . .'⁵

By that time Sri Ramakrishna was a well-known figure in and around Calcutta. Born of poor and orthodox Brahmin parents, Sri Ramakrishna was averse to formal education as well as to the profession of a priest. However, circumstances compelled him to accept a priest's job at Dakshineswar for about six months and soon thereafter

he began his arduous journey to the path divine. His childlike implicit faith in God and resignation to His will, his self-sacrifice and purity of character led him fast along the flights of religious experience. Verifying the existence of God through various paths, within and outside the pale of Hinduism, he gained an experience that has perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius. For all his renunciation, he was not a typical Hindu hermit, for he bore deep love and concern for all human beings. He was particularly happy in the company of people dedicated to the love of God. In fact he was always on the look-out for genuine God-lovers. He himself was a lover of God of the highest order, and he himself realized God through each path recommended by Vaishnava discipline, including the Vatsalya attitude. His experiences with Ramlala, apparently an image of child Rama made of eight metals, is a wonderful illustration of the fusion of the devotee's love for God and His warm response to it.

Both Govinda Datta's widow and Aghoramani heard people talk much of the Paramahansa, as Sri Ramakrishna was known in those days, and became curious to see him. In fact they felt an urge⁶ and one afternoon set out in a boat for Dakshineswar. Sri

4. Vaikunthanath Sanyal, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Līlāmṛta* [Bengali], Calcutta : Basumati Sahitya Mandira, p. 366.

5. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him*, Calcutta : Udbodhan Office, 10th edition, (hereafter *The Master*), pp. 148-49,

6. Sister Devamata narrates an incident to explain the longing of Aghoramani. Her source of information was Swami Ramakrishnananda. One day Aghoramani prepared a meal for her deity Gopala with difficulty, for the firewood was soaked with moisture and the wind was stormy. When she was about to pour the food on a leaf, the wind blew away the leaf. She was annoyed and began accusing Gopala, but to her surprise a little boy brought back the leaf and helped her to put food on the leaf and disappeared. A little later it struck her that Gopala himself had appeared before her in the form of the boy. This made her grief-stricken. In order to console her, one day some friends proposed to take her to see Sri Ramakrishna at the temple of Dakshineswar. She readily agreed. See Sister

Ramakrishna received them standing at his door, as if he expected them, and made them sit in his own room. Sri Ramakrishna gave them spiritual instruction and said that the love of God was the only thing to be attained in life. He also sang some devotional songs and gave them sweetmeats. An orthodox Brahmin lady as she was, Aghoramani did not eat them, for Sri Ramakrishna was once a priest of the Kali temple founded by Rani Rashmani of Kaibarta caste. She gave the sweets to someone else,⁷ which did not escape Sri Ramakrishna's notice.

Sri Ramakrishna could easily gauge the spiritual status, particularly the high degree of devotional fervour, of the arrivals. Later he told about Govinda Datta's widow and Aghoramani, 'Ah, how beautiful is the expression of their faces and eyes! They are, as it were, floating on the current of the love of God. Their eyes are full of the intense love of God. Even the paste-mark on the nose is beautiful.'⁸ In fact their dress and manners expressed only their inner bloom of divine love. Sri Ramakrishna's words and manners gripped their hearts, quietly and imperceptibly. He bade them goodbye with the request, in his typically endearing voice, to visit Dakshineswar once again. Govinda Datta's widow invited Sri Ramakrishna to grace her temple at Kamarhati, and the latter readily agreed.

An interesting anecdote of the same day was narrated by Swami Ramakrishnananda and recorded by Sister Devamata. Aghoramani had brought with her a small bundle containing a little rice, dal (pulse) and some vegetables, while her companions brought rich presents of fruits, flowers and other

things. To Aghoramani's great discomfiture Sri Ramakrishna went and sat near her and said, 'I am feeling very hungry; can you not give me something to eat?'⁹ The poor and humble woman shuddered to think of what she had brought. But Sri Ramakrishna would not spare her. He pointed to her small bundle, which she opened with trepidation. He asked her to cook food for him and showed her the kitchen. Finding no escape she prepared food. When the humble dish was laid before him he asked her to feed him. 'She mixed the rice and curry, and as she put the first mouthful into his mouth she saw her Gopala.'¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna indeed relished the food. Repeatedly he praised her cooking saying that he had tasted real nectar. She was delighted, and her accumulated griefs were blown away.

Aghoramani returned home much impressed but not aware of the depth of her impression perhaps. Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her to be a noble soul, a genuinely holy man and perhaps nothing else. But a few days later as she sat telling her beads she felt an irresistible urge to visit the holy man. As it is customary to offer sweetmeats when one visits a holy man, she bought some ordinary sweets worth about two paise and came to Dakshineswar for the second time. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw her, he said, 'You have come! Give me what you have brought for me.'¹¹ To her astonishment Sri Ramakrishna ate them and seemed to relish her gift. In her presence Sri Ramakrishna behaved like a little boy before his mother. He repeatedly asked her to bring for him her own preparations—vegetable curries and sweets, however humble they might be.

Nevertheless, in her utter bewilderment

Devamata, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, La Crescenta, U.S.A.: Ananda Ashrama, 1928, (hereafter *Ramakrishna*), pp. 112-13.

7. See Akshay Kumar Sen, *Śrī Śrī Rāma-kṛṣṇa Punthi* [Bengali], Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 5th edition, p. 301.

8. *Great Master*, p. 634.

9. *Great Master*, p. 638.

10. *Ramakrishna*, p. 113.

11. *Ramakrishna*, p. 114.

the 'Brahmani of Kamarhati', as Sri Ramakrishna called her in those days, thought that he was a queer sort of holy man; for instead of talking of God he talked only of food. She made up her mind not to visit him again, but something strong drew her back to Dakshineswar soon. On that day she brought a vegetable preparation in a bowl. Sri Ramakrishna ate and praised it highly saying, 'Ah, how beautifully cooked! It is, as it were, very nectar.'¹² It brought tears of joy to her eyes. She returned home with a tingle of joy lingering in her heart. The charm of the holy man had gradually its firm hold upon her, and she began to frequent Dakshineswar, always with some preparations in her hand. Sri Ramakrishna ate with relish whatever she brought for him. But he went on pestering her with demands more and more. All this would often set her thinking, 'Gopala, is this the result of my meditation on you? You have brought me to a sadhu who wants only to eat. I'll never [visit him] any more.'¹³ Nevertheless, however hard she might try she could not resist the deep attraction she felt for Sri Ramakrishna, and kept visiting Dakshineswar all the more. Love of God had deeply penetrated her. 'Vatsalyabhava' was in her very nature, and for that she loved to feed the Master. She did not bother much about theology.¹⁴ This attraction for Gopala in Sri Ramakrishna gradually took hold, melted and transformed the aspirant Aghoramani Devi into Gopaler Ma.

Following that remarkable experience, Gopaler Ma had unbroken communion with God for about two months. No delight of life could give her more contentment than

this surpassingly sweet experience. On her next visit to Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna said to her: 'Why do you perform so much Japa now? You have achieved much indeed.'

Gopaler Ma: Shall I not perform Japa? Have I attained everything?

The Master: Yes, you have attained everything.

Gopaler Ma: Everything?

The Master: Yes, everything.

Gopaler Ma: What do you say? Have I attained everything?

The Master: Yes, everything. Performance of Japa, practising penance, etc., for yourself have been finished. But you may do these things, if you like, for this body [showing himself], so that it may keep well.

Gopaler Ma: Then whatever I'll do from now on, is yours, yours, yours.¹⁵

And from now onward Gopala fully occupied her heart. She came to realize, and Sri Ramakrishna too approved of it, that Sri Ramakrishna was not different from her baby Gopala. In fact they were one and the same. To her, Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of spiritual love, and her mind was now filled with deep love and attraction which a mother feels for her young child.

She threw her rosary into the Ganges. Her only spiritual practice remained confined to prattling with the baby Gopala. However, about a couple of months later the visions became rarer. Had it not been so, said Sri Ramakrishna, her body would have perished. Sri Ramakrishna always spoke highly of her exalted spiritual state. For instance, he said on July 13, 1885: 'The Brahmani of Kamarhati sees many visions. . . . Gopala sleeps with her. It is not imagination, but fact. She saw that Gopala's palms were red. He walks with her. She suckles Him at her breast. They talk to each other. . . . Formerly, I too

12. *Great Master*, p. 638.

13. *Great Master*, p. 639.

14. See Ramchandra Datta, *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahamsadever Jīvan Vṛttānta* [Bengali], Calcutta: Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyan, B.S. 1357, p. 152.

15. *Great Master*, pp. 642-43.

used to see many visions, but now in my ecstatic state I don't see so many.'¹⁶

One day Sri Ramakrishna confronted this simple-minded woman with Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda), then a sceptic and proud of his critical reason. He asked Gopaler Ma to narrate her experiences to Narendra. She hesitated to speak about her experiences to anyone other than Sri Ramakrishna, for they were too dear to her heart to expose them to doubt and distrust. However, being told by Sri Ramakrishna she narrated with great hesitation the story of her experiences with Gopala. She finally pleaded, 'My son, I am a poor ignorant woman. I don't rightly understand things. You are learned and intelligent. Now tell me if these visions are mere imaginations or realities.' Deeply moved by her story Narendra assured her saying, 'Yes mother, they are all true.'¹⁷

The great connoisseur of spirituality that Sri Ramakrishna was, he led Gopaler Ma along the golden path of divine love; and in that journey he not only tenderly regarded her attainments but chastised also, when the situation so demanded. Once Sri Ramakrishna was annoyed when he observed that Gopaler Ma had accepted a packet of gifts from Balaram's family members. Only when she was struck with repentance did he treat her as before.

As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna maintained throughout, the same attitude towards Gopaler Ma. Over and over again, with a conviction that could not perhaps be argued with, he treated her as his mother, for he was her baby Gopala. One day in the presence of some devotees, Sri Ramakrishna in a divine mood began to caress Gopaler Ma from head to foot, like a child when it meets its mother, and said, 'This body is filled with Hari only; it con-

sists of Hari alone.'¹⁸ On the sacred Janmashtami Day, the birthday of Sri Krishna, Gopaler Ma brought her Gopala (Sri Ramakrishna) some food prepared by herself. But Sri Ramakrishna was already affected by throat-cancer and could not take the food, at which she felt dismayed. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Please give me your blessings.'¹⁹

The throat-cancer worsened, much to the distress of Gopaler Ma, and the frail body of Sri Ramakrishna finally succumbed to it. Sri Ramakrishna gave up his mortal coil, but left Gopaler Ma as a living example of the great tradition of the Vatsalya attitude and as the moon of inspiration to aspirants who tread the path of devotion to God.

Sri Ramakrishna's mortal life over, Gopaler Ma was greatly disheartened, but her spiritual life deepened further and led her to greater heights of realization. Once while attending the Chariot Festival at Mahesh on the western bank of the Ganges, she was blessed with the vision of Gopala in all beings, and she saw in every created thing a revelation of Gopala. Inebriated with this divine vision she lost her external consciousness for the time being. Describing her experience she later said, 'At the time, I was not myself; I danced and laughed—created a second Kurukshetra.'²⁰ Till then only a lover of Gopala, she now became also a lover of her fellowmen; everybody to her was but Gopala.

Saintliness shone on her countenance, and in fact her very being radiated comfort and solace. She continued to inspire people from far and near. Once in Balaram's house a group of devotees pestered her with questions. She tried to avoid them by persuading them to approach Sarat, Tarak and Yogen—the sannyasi disciples of Sri Rama-

16. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, (hereafter *Gospel*), p. 780.

17. See *Great Master*, p. 657.

18. *Great Master*, p. 655.

19. *Gospel*, p. 825.

20. *Great Master*, p. 661.

krishna. This could not dissuade the devotees, and she finally agreed saying, 'Well, wait a while, let me ask Gopala.' It seems she came into communion with her Gopala, and the question-answer session went on smoothly—devotees questioning and Gopala answering through Gopaler Ma.²¹

With advancing age her body became decrepit, but she continued to live a life representing 'the old India . . . the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, . . .'²² Her life was a challenge to modern sceptics who always suspect the validity of spiritual experience. The living flame of love that she was, she was always radiating love and sweetness, purity and peace. To the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna she was a living exemplar of the glory of the Master's life and teachings.

Gopaler Ma, beginning her life as a typical orthodox superstitious Brahmin lady, underwent an amazing transformation.

21. See Swami Gambhirananda, *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Bhaktamālīkā* [Bengali], Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, II, B.S. 1359, pp. 410-11.

22. A statement made by Swami Vivekananda; *The Master*, p. 149.

Enlightenment brought her broad-mindedness. Love of God, which welled endlessly from her heart, loosened the grip of prejudice, narrow traditions, formal ceremonials and rigidity of faith, on her. This octogenarian lady accepted the European, Sister Nivedita, as the 'daughter of Naren', and showered affection on her. Sister Nivedita wrote, 'I feel thrilled, for I believe that Gopaler Ma's sainthood is as great as that of Paramahansa. For in her was such motherhood that the heart of Ramakrishna became a child to her. Could more be said?'²³ Gopaler Ma spent the last two and a half years of her life with Sister Nivedita at 17 Bosepara Lane, Calcutta. She died of old age at over ninety years,²⁴ on July 8, 1906. In India of the nineteenth century, the exalted woman mystic Gopaler Ma shines as one of the brightest stars, shedding light and bliss and exemplifying all-consuming love for God.

23. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Nivedita Girls' School, 1961, p. 202.

24. See *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, II, 1967, p. 370.

AGING AND EVOLUTION

SWAMI VIDYATMANANDA

None of us likes the idea of aging. We view the passing years with alarm. We see the changes that come despite anything we can do: the tendency to walk up flights of stairs we used to run up, the need to rest after the midday meal, an increasing dislike to participate in active pastimes.

Ours is a moment in history when youth is honoured above all else. There are organizations which ban those over twenty-one as too aged to qualify as members. Em-

ployment opportunities decline radically for those approaching thirty-five. Recently one of our young devotees at the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna at Gretz (France) replied with real anguish, when I congratulated him on his birthday, 'I don't want to be old.' He had just turned twenty.

We tend to feel today, as we reach forty or fifty, completely out of things—disgraced, humiliated, almost good for nothing. And the increasing numbers of retired

people sixty or sixty-five and older are regarded as a major problem by society. These oldsters do not know what to do with themselves, either. They are a problem to themselves. The celebrated French moralist and writer of maxims, La Rochefoucauld, said: 'Oldsters are fond of giving good advice in order to console themselves for not being in a condition to furnish bad examples.' Mme Simone de Beauvoir's latest book concerns the subject of aging. Its English edition is titled *The Coming of Age*. Mme de Beauvoir finds that aging is nothing but a slow process of deterioration, with very little to compensate for the decline in physical and mental vigour. A picture of unalloyed gloom.

It certainly appears that God made a mistake in creating the world as he did. The drama is written the wrong way around, with all the dull passages at the end instead of at the beginning, and the climax at the beginning instead of at the end where, according to the canons of good composition, it ought to be. It would be much better to have been old first and gotten that phase over with, and young later when we know how to enjoy the remarkable blessings of youth. 'Youth', said George Bernard Shaw, 'is a wonderful thing. What a crime to waste it on children!'

But things have been designed in this awkward manner, and there is no getting around it. It is therefore prudent to seek a means of adapting ourselves to the design as it exists. This applies to those who are aging, who have a need for consolation, a *raison d'être* for the condition in which they find themselves. It applies equally to the young, since in spite of anything they can do—their disdain of their elders and their hard judgements of them—they are sure to find themselves in the same situation one day, having to deal with the problem of growing old.

Let us then try to see whether there is some advantage to be gained from growing

old, some evolutionary benefit to be derived from aging.

* * *

Various formulas are offered to help us cope with this problem. From standing on our head to eating naturalist foods, from doing positive thinking to imbibing massive doses of carrot juice, from having our face lifted to submitting to injections of hormones—remedies are offered supposedly capable of preserving our youth or bringing rejuvenation. Or we are told simply to ignore the passing years; you are as young as you feel. But the true state of affairs cannot really be disguised. We look with shame and pity upon those who follow this advice—oldsters trying to act like youngsters. Hilarity on the part of what the Americans call our senior citizens (in an effort to avoid at all costs using the term 'old persons') is not very hilarious.

But we who have faith have to believe that the Maker of the universe has built a purpose into His design. The process of aging, difficult as it is to accept, must have been introduced to serve some end. I venture to say that the object of the phenomenon of aging is to remind us undeniably and constantly of our limitedness, our mortality, and to launch us on the process of being reduced, of being broken, of becoming dispassionate. Such dispassion, all the saints and sages have told us, is the condition necessary before the ultimate solution to the human condition can be found.

The British writer, Gerald Heard, once contributed an article to the review *Vedanta and the West* entitled 'Is Old Age Worth While?'¹ What he said is that the declining years are useful to us because the physical processes slow down, giving the mental processes a better opportunity to function undistracted by drives and emotions. Being

1. *Vedanta and the West*, Hollywood: Vedanta Society of Southern California, May-June 1950, pp. 80-83.

less active, one is more contemplative. And with increased contemplation there comes a certain quiet joy, a certain inner harmony. Old age, said Heard, is worthwhile because those who know how to use it rightly can thus profit from it in becoming sage, wise, at peace with themselves, all passion spent. But surely there is nothing automatic about this, no guarantee that it will work out in this way. Plato remarked in *The Republic* that 'Solon was under a delusion when he said that a man when he grows old may learn many things, for he can no more learn much than he can run much.' Youth is the time for any extraordinary toil. We have all of us encountered far more old persons dissatisfied than sage. Frustration is far more common among the old than is peace of mind. For most people the answer to Gerald Heard's question is negative. No, in these terms, old age is surely not worthwhile.

Here, then, is where Vedanta's emphasis on the falsity of the individual ego comes to our aid and furnishes a useful point of view for contemplating the phenomenon of our decline. Vedanta insists that my belief in my separate existence is a lie. This illusion of separate individuality is the surest evidence of the deluding power of maya. Shankara says :

Man is in bondage because he mistakes what is non-Atman for his real Self. This is caused by ignorance. Hence follows the misery of birth and death. Through ignorance, man identifies the Atman with the body, taking the perishable for the real. Therefore he nourishes this body, and anoints it, and guards it carefully. He becomes enmeshed in the things of the senses like a caterpillar in the threads of its cocoon.²

The rhythm of the universe—its rises and declines—should disabuse us of this delusion. The purpose of aging is to force us to see God's pattern—if we are intelligent

enough to accept it in that way.

In youth ego is very strong. 'I am all,' is its motto. There is a blind confidence, an utter self-assurance, a perfect selfishness that to older people is simply astonishing. One remembers the story of the American humorist Mark Twain who recounted that when he was twenty he found his father terribly ignorant ; however, by the time Twain had reached forty he was amazed to see how much his father had learned in the meantime. Or as Oscar Wilde said, 'Children start out by loving their parents ; when they are grown up they judge them ; sometimes they pardon them.' 'I can do anything, I can have anything, no one can best me'—this is what the ignorant ego says. And it follows this thought, and it does do and it does get. It does prevail for a time. All is swept away before the magic power of youth, before what Shakespeare called blissful ignorance.

I suspect that this is really why business firms today tend more and more to hire younger and younger people. It is not simply a question of physical force or attractiveness. To believe in the nonsense that many firms fabricate and peddle, a good supply of blissful ignorance is mandatory. The disillusionment of the older worker keeps him from toiling ardently enough.

Then troubles begin. Slowly the blissful ignorance is shattered. Difficulties in the family, difficulties of a professional nature. Health problems, money problems, problems with the wife or husband, problems with the children ; problems with one's own mind and will and nerve. One begins to falter. One senses the competition of others, particularly those who are younger. One tries to hold on, to tighten one's grip, to stem the tide. And suddenly one is old and frustrated. How could it have happened? Life has passed one by, and one is now nothing but just one more unhappy oldster. When it is too late to do anything about it, one discovers that the so-called

². *Vivekacūḍāmaṇī*, - 137.

world-denying view has much to recommend it. As generally led, life is a swindle. Maya promises much and delivers little. Maya is a cheat which not only furnishes shoddy merchandise, but has the effrontery to charge exorbitant prices for the stuff.

Vedanta's point of view is what one may call enlightened dispassion. This is meant to keep this from happening. And as such it is a very pragmatic position. Renunciation, instead of being a painful sacrifice, becomes a behavioural pattern working ultimately to one's advantage. One perceives that the law of the universe is set to reduce us. One accepts this fact and co-operates with the law. Oh, it is not easy. All one's instincts are averse. Vedantists are often accused of being irrational idealists. On the contrary, I see them as being the most astute realists. They know that, as usually played, life is a game in which no one can be winner. Of course the Vedantist usually does his austerities as spiritual practice, to make himself pleasing to God. But he need not. He may take the very rational position of *neti, neti* (not this, not this),³ denying all appearance, holding out for nothing less than the changeless.

But we must not begin this process without being aware of its hazards. Whether we are householder devotees or monastic members, the same curious law applies. Once begun, there is no turning back. The Promethian bid is taken seriously. One's audacity in daring to try to become dehypnotized is registered in heaven. A magic circle is thrown around one, so to say, outside of which one can never again step. The Indian calls it being bit by a cobra. 'You have been bitten by the cobra and you must surely die.'

* * *

As I open myself up to this process of reduction, I begin to see, first of all, that

other people are better than I had thought they were, and I myself am less estimable than I had all along believed myself to be. We are normally so concentrated on proving how able we are that we have no chance to see the good in others. 'Look at me,' each cries. 'See what I have done. Appreciate me. Praise me.' And since everybody is similarly engaged, no one sees anything. Having lived for a long time in Hollywood, I have often heard actors talking to each other. It is really amusing. Each is engaged in recounting to the other his latest success on the screen. Of course, these are not conversations, for each is deaf while the other speaks. It is two monologues going on at the same time. Only he who is talking is listening—to himself.

Certainly we cannot appreciate others when we are completely occupied in appreciating ourselves. And our relations with others will never be anything but commercial. However we may consider it naive, the method of Dale Carnegie contained a basic truth. This author of the phenomenally best-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* insisted on a very fundamental formula: 'Be interested in other people; learn to be sincerely interested in other people. To do this will win their confidence and affection, and you will benefit thereby.' This may be a mechanical process and at base self-seeking. Nevertheless it proves the basic truth of what I am saying. Don't speak. Listen. It is amazing what one hears. It is amazing how interesting and admirable and heroic one finds other people to be.

John Updike is a modern American writer. One of his best books is *The Centaur*, about a high school teacher named George Caldwell. We see him through the eyes of his teen-age son: a droll, clumsy man for whom everything seems to go wrong. We are convinced that Caldwell is a fool. Only as we reach the end of the book does the revelation come that in

3. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II. iii. 6, and III. ix. 26.

George Caldwell we are dealing with a genuine hero, who is simply so modest that he does not assert himself as other people do, and consequently is consistently underrated.

After the death of Swami Madhavananda, ninth President of the Ramakrishna Mission, one of the younger Swamis of the Order wrote an appreciation of the late President entitled 'A Gentleman Passes Away'. At first this title seemed inapt to me, because we do not associate sadhus with questions of social standing or good breeding. But as I read the article I could see what the author was trying to convey: the modesty, the good manners, the consideration that Swami Madhavananda habitually manifested toward others.

Here was this Swami, one of the most senior monks of our Order, with a distinguished career as editor, author and administrator. He had every right to assert himself, to command. Yet he never did this. He acted as servant of all; he opened himself up to the needs of everyone. As one who asked much of him I can testify that this is true. As President, Swami Madhavananda was obliged to initiate on the average of ten to fifteen people a day, day in and day out. Although his health was poor at this time, he never treated his duty as chief guru in any mechanical way. He insisted on talking personally at least briefly with all candidates for initiation, listening sympathetically to the accounts of the joys and sorrows of their lives.

Swami Madhavananda's supreme act of consideration occurred at the time of his fatal illness in 1965. He had fallen sick at the Durga Puja time, the three-day autumnal festival in Bengal which is traditionally a period of light-heartedness and rejoicing. The Swami was in the hospital in a critical condition. He knew that his death would upset the festivities at Belur Math and inconvenience many people. Somehow he held off death by the force of his will till

the moment when the celebration was over. When the news was brought to him that the worship had been terminated, he smiled and in a few minutes passed away.

That is to say, as we co-operate with this tendency of life to reduce us, to break us, we become modest. Thank God that this is so. We find our joy in the joys of others, our success in the success of others; and finding sorrow in the sorrows of others, we become genuinely sympathetic and compassionate. An expression often repeated is the following: 'To understand is to forgive.' I would change that and say, 'To understand is to admire.' Then life becomes full of juice for us, rich to the extent that we are able to live in others. Someone we always thought unsympathetic proves to be wonderfully attracting. Mr. X reveals astonishing gifts we never knew he had. Mme Y, known as a holy terror, is seen to be what she really is, an insecure and frightened person, only trying to establish her worth, and seen in that light, very, very lovable.

* * *

Jean-Pierre Camus was the bishop of Belley in France, and a biographer of the famous spiritual director, St. Francis de Sales. Camus reported a conversation which he had with de Sales. 'Mon Père,'⁴ he said one day, 'how is it possible for those who are themselves high in office to practice the virtue of obedience?'

Francis de Sales replied, 'They have greater and more excellent ways of doing so than their inferiors.'

As Camus did not comprehend the other's meaning, de Sales went on: 'Those who are bound by obedience are usually subject to one superior only. But those who are themselves superiors have a wider field for obedience. For if they bear in mind that it is God who has placed them over other men, and gives them the rule that they have,

4. 'My Father'.

they will exercise it out of obedience to God, and thus, even while commanding, they will obey. There is a yet higher point of obedience to which all superiors may aspire, even that to which St. Paul alludes, when he says, "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all." It is by such universal obedience to everyone that we become "all things to all men"; and serving everyone for our Lord's sake, we esteem all to be our superiors.'

'In accordance with this rule,' concluded Camus, 'I have often observed how Francis de Sales treated everyone, even the most insignificant persons who approached him, as though he were the inferior, never repulsing anyone, never refusing to enter into conversation, to speak or to listen, never betraying the slightest sign of weariness, impatience, or annoyance, however importune or ill-timed the interruption. To those who asked him why he thus wasted his time, his constant reply was: "It is God's will; it is what he requires of me. What more need I ask? While I am doing this, I am not required to do anything else. God's holy will is the centre from which all we do must radiate; all else is mere weariness and excitement."'

Indeed, secondly, I would even go so far as to say that as we open ourselves up to life's effort to break us down, *we become willing to accept humiliation*. We see that to absorb the frustrations, resentments, and hurts of others harms us not at all and perhaps renders them a service.

Stated in less extreme terms, I would say that as we age we learn that on the whole an attitude of acceptance is preferable to an attitude of opposition.

I recently read a book about China entitled *The Chinese Looking Glass*, written by an American reporter named Denis Bloodworth. He has lived in China for many years and is married to a Chinese woman. So I think we may have confidence in what he says. I was struck by the

following passage: The occidental sees the universe as not made to his liking, and he busies himself continually in trying to remould it to his taste. The Chinese accepts the universe as it is and tries to change himself so as to get along with it comfortably as it is.

Whether this is a good attitude to follow in dealing with material things or not, I cannot say. But I do believe it is the right policy to adopt in dealing with others, and as we become less assertive we learn the wisdom of this approach.

There is at Gretz a new station which we refer to as the *poubelle* factory. 'Poubelle' is French for 'garbage'. It is a long sort of construction with an entrance for trucks at one end and an opening at the other end where the finished product comes out. Trucks go about the village of Gretz accepting every sort of worthless stuff—the useless and the broken and the dirty. They back up to the entrance of this factory and thrust in their load. Certain processes occur, and after a time out the other end comes compost—beneficial and useful for fertilizing the garden. This little factory furnishes a leaflet prepared by a bio-chemical laboratory showing the beneficial qualities of the compost. We have used tons of material from the *poubelle* factory to soften and enrich the soil of our vegetable garden and the beds of roses in front of the house.

In the *Bhagavata Purana* one reads about the Avadhuta who had, as we know, twenty-four gurus. That is to say, he took examples for the better conduct of his life from the actions of birds, beasts, nature and man, who acted in some particularly sage manner. I think we could add as a twenty-fifth guru the Gretz *poubelle* factory! What better example than this—to accept all the disagreeable stuff the world is trying to get rid of, and remake it into something worthwhile.

As we grow older we see that making and keeping the peace is more useful than

getting one's own way. We have had our way so often before, and how did that benefit us, really? It just isolated others. And so we accept slights of every kind, lack of consideration on the part of our neighbour, points of view quite disagreeable, the anger and resentments and thoughtlessness of people. To do this is as much of a service as the operation of the poubelle factory. Somehow we ingest it and turn it out as reconciliation and peace.

* * *

Thirdly, as we open up ourselves to this process of reduction, as we co-operate with life's effort to break us down, *we see that no one is indispensable.*

I often think that religious organizations were conceived by God only to teach that truth to their members. In joining a religious organization, whether as a devotee or as a monastic, we naturally feel that we have something to contribute toward its success, and we try our best to make that contribution. We will make it efficient where it was not efficient before; we will develop and carry out certain needed programmes. We will support the organization with our work or our money. What we are really trying to do, often enough, is to express our ego, to get things under our control, to become important. The Lord will even let us succeed for a time, because in a certain measure the Lord uses His followers' ignorance to get certain gross aspects of His work done.

But this can go on only up to a point. The magic is implacable. Our name has been written in the hospital's register—as Sri Ramakrishna used to say—and the patient cannot be released until he has been cured; he cannot run away before the operation has been performed. The moment the idea enters our head that we are indispensable, the Lord will send along someone more gifted than we are, to upset us, to make us miserable, to make us jealous, and eventually to break our hold. Either

we shall be forced to leave, or we shall be forced to submit. The reducing process we have subscribed to cannot be circumvented. One of our monks has the habit of saying that the real purpose of joining a religious organization is to find out that our membership in that organization is of no particular use to it.

In recent years there was an incident in a certain monastic order which illustrates my point. A certain monk, extremely capable and efficient, and at heart very good, had risen to the position of leadership in the order and was generally regarded as destined to hold a very high place in the future. He held a strong opinion on a certain subject, which he began to foster with all his might. Convinced that he was right, he argued with passion and attempted to build up organized support for his point of view. The ruling body loved this monk and recognized his capacities. Maybe his position was even right, but as a holy man he was not acting rightly. He had become deluded. The very thing he had joined the order to get rid of—the certainty of his right to prevail—was exactly what he was manifesting. So the council members relieved this monk of his work, sending him to live in a remote hermitage. He was there for many years, in a position of relatively minor importance. Everything went on quite well without him. Other monks got their chance to try their hands at things, and like him to have an opportunity to participate in this terrible schooling. But the monk learned his lesson. He is once again in a key position in the order. But how different he is now. Having learned that he is not indispensable, he can now be trusted to do the Lord's work well. Everyone knows the story of his so-called disgrace and loves him for what he suffered, how he changed, and for what he has become.

* * *

And this is the fourth point that I wish to make, that *God does his own work.* He

does not need me at all. Work in a religious organization carries with it a very real danger. It is so easy to become deluded. It would seem that with ends so noble, surely the means must be ennobled also. But we know very well how this idea has worked out throughout the ages. The horrors of the Inquisition give the lie to this claim. The wickedness of the wars of religion—which continue even to this day—show what can happen when conscientious but unbroken people delegate themselves to working for so-called noble ends.

As we co-operate with life's design to break us down, the heat and the fury of our activity diminish. Less identification, less anxiety; less anxiety, more fun. Ramakrishna spoke of the onlooker as seeing the play more clearly and enjoying it more than any player. The onlooker is not personally involved. As spectator only, he is free to enjoy the total prospect and the fun.

Sri Ramakrishna became acquainted with a number of people whose scholarship or wealth entitled them everywhere to respect. One of these was Krishnadas Pal, editor, social reformer, and patriot. Of Krishnadas Pal, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Krishnadas Pal came here. I found him full of Rajas. After a little conversation I discovered that he had no stuff inside. I asked him about man's duty. He said, "To do good to the world." I said, "My dear Sir, who are you? What good will you do to the world? Is the world such a small thing that you can help it? I know what you mean by helping. To feed a number of persons, to treat them when they are sick, to construct a road or dig a well. God alone looks after the world. Let a man first realize Him. Let a man get the authority from God and be endowed with His power; then, and then alone, may he think of doing good to others."'

The secret is that only when we see that God does His own work can we begin to work well. Because—what has our attitude become? One of thankfulness to Him that He gives me the privilege of feeling that I am doing something for Him. 'Let the

giver bow down to the receiver and give thanks,' said Swami Vivekananda, 'for it is the existence of the receiver that permits the giver to practise devotion.' In the truest sense, work thus becomes adoration. We work well then because there is no idea of accomplishing, of helping, or even doing good. God in His kindness lets me adore Him with this inadequate worship. There is no danger to anyone when work is done in that way.

* * *

The Spanish Jesuit, Baltasar Gracian, advised: 'It is best to leave things before things leave you.' This is what I have tried to say in these reflections, although not in quite so brutal a fashion. We cannot triumph over the disagreeable fact of aging. Then why not turn our decline into a benefit? Co-operate with aging which, like an exacting teacher, will force and cajole us into doing what it is to our own best interest to do. In acting thus we are fostering our own evolution.

Sri Ramakrishna put it in a very psychological way: 'In his last birth a man is endowed with Sattva. His mind is directed to God. He longs for God. He withdraws his mind from worldly things.'⁵

We pass from the ignorance of Tamas through the activity of Rajas to the dispassion of Sattva. These three stages make up the course of man's evolution. Seeing and heeding the implications of aging develop Sattva in us. As we co-operate with life's effort to break us down we develop, among other Sattvic attributes, an understanding that others are more estimable than we thought; a willingness to accept humiliation; a realization that we are not indispensable; and a comprehension that God does His own work.

The calamity we were prepared to weep over we have refashioned into a handsome benefit.

5. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, p. 571.

DIRGHATAMAS : THE VEDIC PHILOSOPHER

DR. SADASHIV AMBADAS DANGE

Writers on Indian philosophy take to the Upaniṣads as the fountain-head, thinking that what stands beyond that period, in the ritual of the Brāhmaṇa-texts, is nothing else than mere Karma-Kāṇḍa. Naturally, they dwell only on such names as Yājñavalkya, Pravāhaṇa Jaivali, Āruṇi Uddālaka, Raikva, Aśvapati Kekaya and the like. The philosophers of the Upaniṣadic period tried to solve the riddle of the ultimate Reality mainly through three approaches : (1) the cosmological, (2) the physical, and (3) the psychological. The last was the best of approaches, as it was also the final and more subtle. The cosmological approach is one in which various cosmic forces such as water, fire, air, etc., are said individually to be the ultimate source of the universe. The physical one is where the forces of the human body such as breath, speech, etc., are concerned ; and the psychological one is that wherein the experience of deep sleep is examined. The last has been very finely described by Ajātaśatru. The speculations went yet ahead ; and it was propounded that the experienceless sleep is the best example of the stage of ultimate Reality, where there is no consciousness of the worldly experience whatsoever, the only consciousness being that of the self.

The Greek philosopher Thales, propounding Water as the ultimate principle, compares with the theory of ancient Egyptian thinkers that Nun (primeval waters) is the ultimate Reality, and also with the Indian thought that it is in water that all the gods were.¹ Raikva said that it is Air that is the ultimate Reality ; and correspondingly the Greek Philosopher Anaximenes propounded that

1. See *Rg-Veda* (hereafter *Rg*), X. 72. 6. The original reads : यद्देवा अदः सलिले सुसंरब्धा अतिष्ठत ।

the primeval substance is the Vapour. The theory that Fire is the ultimate Reality, which fact is propounded in the concept of the five fires (*pañcāgni*) in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, corresponds to the thought of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who taught that Fire was the source of all things. The Ākāśa (Ether) doctrine taught by Pravāhaṇa Jaivali is reflected in the teaching of Philolaus, according to whom Space (Ether) is the ultimate Reality. These are only a few examples to show the influence of Upaniṣadic thought upon the Greek writers.² However, the point to be noted in the philosophy of the Upaniṣads is the contribution of the Upaniṣadic thinkers to the theory of Ātmanism. It is generally believed that the difference of the body from the soul is the thought contributed by the Upaniṣadic thinkers. It is believed that this thought was not known before ; and, naturally, the Upaniṣadic thinkers are given the credit for it. It has to be remembered, however, that beyond the period of the Upaniṣads, the Brāhmaṇic ritualists had their own method of ritual-philosophy, which is so clear in all their rituals ; and the most striking example of this is the ritual of Agnicayana, which was the symbolic piling of the cosmos with the sun-fire, symbolized as a golden figure of man on the altar, as the central principle. In the hymns of the *Rg-Veda* various 'seers' have recorded glimpses of real philosophy ; but their names are not known to the modern students of philosophy, who start from the Upaniṣads only. These seers relate their experiences as 'visions', and it is necessary to examine

2. I have made a detailed study of this subject in an article contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, to be compiled by the Regis College, Ontario, Canada.

these 'visions' to get a first-hand idea of their '*darśana*', which is the real term for philosophy in the Hindu tradition. In a number of cases, true to the spirit of the Hindu tradition, the names of the ancient Vedic seers have not come down to us, though their thought has become famous. Thus, the hymn known as the '*Nāsadīya*'³ is referred to as the most ancient example of the Hindu (Aryan) approach to the speculations regarding the creation of this universe; and yet the name of the seer is unknown to us, the tradition saying that it is Prajāpati himself! Another important hymn is the one known as the '*Puruṣasukta*',⁴ the seer of which is said to be Nārāyaṇa, of whom nothing more is known. There are many other seers whose names have been mentioned, and are plausible; but their thought has not been taken serious note of by modern scholarship on Hindu philosophy. The first Vedic seer who says, though casually, that there was the principle called *asat* in the beginning and that from it came *sat*, is named Bṛhaspati due to the fact that Brahmanaspati is mentioned in the hymn at one stage.⁵ This beginning of the philosophic discussion is mostly forgotten, though the Upaniṣadic discussions regarding there being *sat* or *asat* are well remembered. Likewise, the vision of the seer Vasukra regarding the working of the cosmos has not reached modern students (including such masters on this subject as Dr. Radhakrishnan and Hiriyanna), as they were not particular in probing the Ṛg-Vedic seers' 'visions'.⁶ The visions of the Ṛg-Vedic seers were mixed; with the cosmic workings they combined ritual details; for they believed that the latter are intimately connected with the former. But because of this they are

thought to be more magical than philosophical. And this is the main reason why they are treated as less important by scholars. But that is a mistake; and in committing this mistake scholars shut their eyes to the very source of philosophical thought, not knowing that they are blind to the very '*darśana*' itself! In certain cases, the thought of the Ṛg-Vedic seers has been taken up by the Upaniṣads; and, through them, it was studied by the later scholars of '*darśana*'; but the pity is that it was believed to be from the Upaniṣads themselves!! Having done so, new and fantastic (or rather philosophic!) interpretations were attached to it, not bothering to see the original context from which it was taken. The case of the seer Dīrghatamas is only one of many such.

The personal history of Dīrghatamas is shrouded in mystery. The *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas mention him, the former only casually⁷ and the latter weaving queer-looking accounts around him. The Vedic tradition, however, recognizes him as a great seer, who enjoyed a hundred years of life.⁸ His greatest contribution to Indian thought is his concept of Jīva and its being separate from the mortal body. It is this thought that stands at the basis of the later Upaniṣadic philosophy of Ātmanism. The *Ṛg-Veda* knew the word '*Ātman*'; but it was, for almost all the Vedic seers, only the principle of Air.⁹ It is Dīrghatamas who differentiates Ātman, as the soul, as being separate from the body; not only this, he differentiates it from '*Prāṇa*' (the principle of life-breath) and also from the subtle element called '*asu*'. This will be clear from a verse from one of his hymns, called the '*Asya-vāmīya*',¹⁰ which gets so

3. *Rg*, X. 129.

4. *Rg*, X. 90.

5. See *Rg*, V. 2.

6. For the 'Vision of Vasukra', see the present author's article of that title, *Journal of the University of Bombay*, XL, October 1971, pp. 1-26.

7. See *Mahābhārata*, Sabhā Parvan, 7. 11; and Anusāsana Parvan, 165. 42.

8. See *Rg*, I, 158. 1, 6; 147. 3; 152. 6; IV. 4. 13, etc.

9. See *Rg*, I. 34. 7; VII. 87. 2, etc.

10. *Rg*, I. 164.

named from its first verse which starts as '*Asya vāmasya palitasya hotuh*' :

Who saw the very first-born, when the boneless one bore the one having bones? Whence came the blood, the life-breath and the soul of Earth [*asuḥ*, *asrk*, *ātmā*]? Who, indeed, went to the wise to ask?¹¹

The difference between the *asu* and Ātman (the soul) is clear in the passage noted above, where the word *asu* indicates the subtle element of 'Prāṇa'; and Ātmā is beyond it. At yet another place this difference is marked, though the word 'Ātman' is not used there. In the place of the word 'Ātman' we have the word 'Jīva'. The seer of that hymn is again Dīrghatamas; and the expression using the word *asu* comes in the imagery of the ritual-fire. The fire is said to be kindled by the fingers; and the latter are said to be his 'sisters'. It is said to be taking off their old age, and giving them new life of brilliance. It is also said to be imparting them the *asu* and the Jīva.¹² Though the word Jīva comes at various places in the *Rg-Veda*, the distinction of the concept of Jīva from that of *asu* is marked prominently by Dīrghatamas.¹³ There is only one more place in the *Rg-Veda* where the words *asu* and Jīva come together, and there the sun is said to be both the *asu* and Jīva of the dawn;¹⁴ but there the distinction is not made clear by the seer Kutsa of the family of Aṅgiras. As said above, the word Jīva comes at various places in the *Rg-Veda*; but the seers do not show clear acquaintance with the exact meaning of the word, using it only in the general sense of 'a living creature'. But that the 'living' principle (principle of life) is to be termed Jīva is an innovation of Dīrghatamas, allowing some

benefit of doubt to Kutsa of the family of Aṅgiras. Nowhere do we find in the *Rg-Veda* a clear distinction between the various elements of the human body (as blood, breath, bones) and the soul, as in the hymn ascribed to Dīrghatamas noted above. And comparing the two passages of Dīrghatamas himself,¹⁵ we see that in one he uses the word Ātman and in the other Jīva, which leaves no doubt about the fact that it is he who first interprets (or at least is the first to know) the changed conception behind the word Ātman, and stresses that it is synonymous with Jīva. It is here that we have the first-ever concept of the Jīvātman. Hence, it has to be accepted that Dīrghatamas was the first seer-philosopher to contrast the terms 'Prāṇa' and 'Ātman', the former being '*asu*' and the latter 'Jīva'. Actually, the controversy regarding the mutual superiority between 'Prāṇa' (the vital breath on the microcosmic level, and Air on the macrocosmic level) and Ākāśa continued even in the Upaniṣadic period. Raikva propounded, as was noted earlier by us, that Air was the chief element and the ultimate Reality; and Pravāhaṇa Jaivali chose a yet subtler element called Ākāśa (Ether) as the ultimate Reality. Dīrghatamas contributed to the then world of thinkers the element of Jīvātman; but his contribution was forgotten in the later din of Upaniṣadic controversy. The reason, probably, was that the *Rg-Vedic* 'seer' was also a ritualist, in addition to his being a mystic thinker! But his thought deserves further probe.

Not only did Dīrghatamas propound that the Jīvātman (soul) was different from, and subtler than, the element of Breath (Prāṇa), but also that it could be separated from the living organism which we call body, and which dies when bereft of the soul. The imagery of Dīrghatamas centres on the sun and the earth, as does that of Kutsa on the

11. *Rg*, I. 164. 4.

12. See *Rg*, I. 140. 8.

13. See *Rg*, I. 140. 8.

14. See *Rg*, I. 113. 16.

15. See *Rg*, I. 160. 4 and I. 140. 8.

sacrificial fire ; but it is to be noted with pertinent care that Dīrghatamas bases his imagery of the cosmic relationship on that of the human body (or, for that matter, a living body) inasmuch as he refers to the blood, the bones, etc. He is quite clear in his concept of the soul wandering away from the body, when he says, 'The Jīva of the dead (*mṛtasya*) wanders,'¹⁶ which enshrines the belief that the body dies, yet the soul remains and wanders to seek a fresh body. The other side of the belief, that the soul and the body stay together, is also clearly stated by him in the words, 'The Jīva stays in the same abode that perishes—*Amartyo martyena sa-yoniḥ*.'¹⁷ Thus, he shows a clear grasp of the concept of the soul that stays in the body, and yet gets away from it. This is the very basis of the principle of the transmigration of the soul. Though Dīrghatamas describes the upper cosmos and the daily rising and setting of the sun, his basic concept regarding the soul staying with the body and getting away from it can hardly be doubted. The belief recorded by this seer here is reflected finely in the later Upaniṣadic thought which says, 'What is not endowed with life (Jīva) dies ; Jīva (soul) does not die.'¹⁸ Dīrghatamas says further that the soul enlivens the body, which, hence, gets born in various forms.¹⁹

Another contribution of Dīrghatamas is that it is he who first 'saw' the vision of the Two Birds that rest on the same tree, one of whom eats the sweet fruit of the tree (*pippalam*), while the other only looks on without eating. The verse is famous and has formed around it heaps of interpretation,

16. *Rg*, I. 164. 30.

17. *Rg*, I. 164. 30.

18. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI. 11. 3.

19. See *Rg*, I. 164. 32 ; the accent of *bahuprajāh* does not allow the meaning to be 'one who has many children' as suggested by scholars ; Sayana, the commentator of the *Rg-Veda*, is right in rendering the expression as 'one who takes many births'.

if one may say so. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*,²⁰ each of which adds a verse to it, have incorporated the image to impart their philosophical teaching. As both have this and the next verse common, they certainly have borrowed both from the earlier tradition. As we have seen, the first verse (which shows the vision of the Two Birds) is from Dīrghatamas ;²¹ the next is from the later Vedic tradition, but follows the image of the first, when it speaks of the Puruṣa sitting on the same tree. It is this second verse that speaks of the two Puruṣas on the same tree, one of them being the Paramātmān and the other the Jīvātman. But the basis of the thought is the vision of Dīrghatamas. As noted earlier, the seer Dīrghatamas applies the microcosmic (that is, of the individual body) observation regarding the soul and the body to the cosmos, where the sun is said to be the soul by him. On this analogy, he describes the sun as the 'animating, actively moving soul' that stands in the midst of the cosmic waters—*anat śaye turagātu jīvam*.²² Incidentally, the waters are often conceived as the females, or the foetus in which the principle of fire stays to fructify them for fresh creation. Here the seer employs the same image, and states that the sun is the generating element, in addition to its being the very soul. He does not stop at the idea that the sun is the ultimate truth, that is, the soul ; he says that the outer form (the orb) of the sun is to be distinguished from the inner principle of steady light and fire, which is the real essence of the divinity that is visible in the sky. The orb is the 'cover' (*vavri*), thus suggesting that even in the sun there is the outer 'body' and the inner soul. He never uses the word 'Puruṣa' in this imagery ; but there

20. See *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (hereafter *Muṇḍaka*), III. iii. 1 ; and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (hereafter *Śvetāśvatara*), IV. 6.

21. See *Rg*, I. 164. 20.

22. *Rg*, I. 164. 30.

is no doubt that the concept of 'the Man-in-the-Waters' was already getting to the forefront in the R̥g-Vedic age,²³ which conveyed at a later stage the concept of 'Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa' (Man traversing in the cosmic Waters), which originally indicated the sun and later Viṣṇu on the serpent in the Waters. When this concept of 'Man-in-the-Waters' got mixed with that of Dīrghatamas, the two birds were seen anthropomorphically as the Jīvātman and the Paramātman. But in the pure image of the seer Dīrghatamas, the birds were never the Jīvātman and Paramātman, though he propagated the Jīva as a distinct element beyond the body, the 'cover' (*vavri*). The two birds, in the first aspect of his image, were the sun in the heavenly region, and the sacrificial fire on the terrestrial plane. This is clear if we note the verse that is earlier to the one that has the two birds. There he speaks of the Father and the Son,²⁴ the former being the sacrificial fire that is believed to sustain the sun, the Son. This is how he connects the Sacrificial fire with the sun here and elsewhere in the hymn.²⁵ But taking his sap from the sacrificial set-up he goes a step ahead in the present image. He takes his stand on the already set belief that the sun is the other end of the cosmic tree, the branches being his rays. We may refer to only one such place, where the cosmic tree is said to shoot down from the sun. Thus, we have the concept of the cosmic pillar (*yupa*) of Varuṇa, whose root is up there, while the shoots come down,²⁶ where it is further said that the shoots enter our hearts. This is the most original concept of the cosmic tree, borrowed later by the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.²⁷ After setting forth

the vision of the two birds, Dīrghatamas takes it further; he says that the solar orb is the haunt of the birds (rays) that eat the honey,²⁸ where he conceives the sun as the tree. At another stage in the same hymn he says that the sun is the bird that holds water to release for the creatures.²⁹ In the image of the tree, he says that the sun is full of nourishing fruit that stands at the top of it;³⁰ the ray-birds eat this sweet fruit. The next step is that these rays come down (or better, fly down) to the terrestrial plane and enter the individual souls, which then partake of the nourishing life-essence of the sun-fruit. So, the individual soul is the bird that eats of the fruit; but the other bird that does not eat is the one in the sun, the soul of the universe. The sun-bird is different from the ray-birds for Dīrghatamas. The individual soul gets its sap through the ray-birds; but the sun-bird simply holds the sap (fruit), as the tree simply holds the fruit, not eating it. The sun is, then, the abode of the supreme Bird (Paramātman) in the most original concept of the seer from whom the Upaniṣads have borrowed the imagery. That the 'Paramātman' is in the sun, is clear enough from the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* also, which speaks of this Puruṣa as: 'Golden-hued';³¹ this also speaks of the *saguṇa* Reality, prior to its being contemplated as the subtle Brahman.³²

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, which takes the verse of the Two Birds from Dīrghatamas, takes another verse from his hymn: 'In the highest heaven stands the Akṣara

23. *Apām puruṣam*; see R̥g, X. 51. 8.

24. See R̥g, I. 164. 18.

25. See R̥g, I. 164. 1, for the concept of the three brothers, the sun, the lightning-fire and the sacrificial fire; also see I. 164.17, 22 and 43.

26. See R̥g, I. 124. 7.

27. See *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II. iii. 1; and *Bhagavad-Gītā*, XVI.1. For a fuller discussion, I may point the inquisitive reader to my Marathi book on 'Hindu Dharma and Philosophy', Poona, 1973, pp. 319 ff.

28. See R̥g, I. 164. 22.

29. *Divyam suparṇam . . . apām garbham*; see R̥g, I. 164. 52.

30. *Pippalam svādu-agre*, R̥g, I. 164. 22.

31. *Muṇḍaka*, III. iii. 3.

32. See *Muṇḍaka*, III. iii. 4 ff.

of the shining *mantra* (Ṛc); therein stay all the gods; (beyond that is the high One;) one who does not know Him, what shall he do with the mere verse?'³³ It will thus be seen that Dīrghatamas first gives the meaning of the *mantra* as the abode of the high God. But the concept of Akṣara for the seer is not limited to the mystic *syllable of the mantra*. On the analogy of the sun-tree whose shoots come down to the individual souls, the Akṣara also is prone to ooze. The word Akṣara means 'non-oozing'; but Dīrghatamas clearly says that the Akṣara oozes.³⁴ Thus, the highest principle is steady; yet it oozes for nourishing the creatures on the earth. Dīrghatamas makes the image very simple and clear further on, when he says that the Akṣara that oozes is seen in the form of rain, which is the visible phase of the highest shining life-giving element of sustenance. For him, the sun is the visible Akṣara as it holds the waters that he releases in the form of rain. But, as the solar orb is only the 'cover' (*vavri*), the real Akṣara stands beyond it. It is both the source of light and of water. This is on the basis of the Vedic concept of the rain-waters being always sunny or full of light (*svaṛ-vatī*). When the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* takes the idea, it still holds on to this original concept of light-water fusion; but the unborn (*aja*) god for it is not in the sun; it is the mid-region fire of the cloud, which it describes as, 'the blue-black Bird of yellowish-green hue, of red eyes, that stays in the womb of the lightning.'³⁵ From this the next step is that of the various flames of the sacrificial fire having varied colours,³⁶ and the next is the image of the Two Birds; next comes the image of the Puruṣa on the tree, we have noted earlier; and the final one is the Highest principle beyond the *mantra* of the Akṣara. The

whole scheme follows the imagery of Dīrghatamas, who fuses sacrificial concepts with the cosmic vision of the sun and the sun-waters (rain), and yet, in the context of the ritual, asserts the concept of the highest Soul of the cosmos.

What has been said above will prove that the seer Dīrghatamas has clearly influenced the philosophic thought of the Upaniṣads; and it is to be noted that the Upaniṣads also do not shed away the images of the sacrificial ritual atmosphere, which speaks for the dominant ancient influence. It has to be admitted that the Upaniṣadic thinkers cannot do away with the 'vision' of the Ṛg-Vedic seers, which may be termed Proto-philosophy. The points to be noted from the vision of Dīrghatamas are as follows:

1. *The Cosmic Tree* (Earlier Vedic Concept): The solar orb is the upper end; it holds the nourishing essence (the honey), which is twofold: (i) Light, and (ii) Water (seemingly); it holds also the essence of Life. The lower end (or the shoots) touches the individual souls.³⁷

2. *The Two Birds*: (A) The original image of Dīrghatamas—(i) the Bird in the solar orb, and (ii) the Bird in the sacrificial fire; (B) Innovation of Dīrghatamas—(i) the Bird in the solar orb (Cosmic Soul), and (ii) the Bird in the individual heart (individual soul)—developed as the Puruṣas later.

3. *The Akṣara*: (A) Light-Fluid principle, Life-essence; (B) The subtle principle beyond words.

4. *The Concept of the 'Double'*: The concept of the Jīva-Ātman; Jīva (soul) and the body—the former immortal, self-moving, resorting to various bodies, the latter prone to vanish, subject to death; also indicated by the word *vavri* (cover).

33. *Śvetāśvatara*, IV. 8; and *Ṛg*, I, 164. 39.

34. *Tatah kṣarati-akṣaram*; *Ṛg*, I. 164. 42.

35. *Śvetāśvatara*, IV. 4.

36. *Śvetāśvatara*, IV. 5.

37. This concept develops later into the Bālakhilya sages, the thumbkins on the banyan tree; see *Mahābhārata*, *Adi Parvan*, 31.

SRI JNANESWAR : THE SAINT OF MAHARASHTRA

SRIMATI SAVITRIBAI KHANOLKAR

As the mist lay slumbering on the silent river, two little shadows moved lightly on the path skirting the contours of the water. The mist muffled sound and darkness in a soft eerie substance which seemed to part easily before the steps of the young boys. They wore only loin cloths and no upper garments. They held hands and moved as if they were completely free of worldly concern. Their heads lifted up with a slight tilt of independence seen only in Self-realized yogīs. Their eyes full of tenderness were intent on some inner purpose. Well, the eldest was Nivr̥tti who could have been a little over ten years old, and the younger was Jñāneśwar, his middle brother two years his junior. On what could they be intent, skimming thus through the nebulous haze of pre-dawn hours?

Soon, Nivr̥tti pointed out the sacred Udumbara tree¹ by the Godāvarī river where R̥ṣi Gautama taught back in hoary antiquity.

‘Jñāni, this is the place. Come, let us both sit under the sacred tree and do pay attention to what I’m about to say.’

‘O Nivr̥tti, my beloved elder brother,’ pleaded Jñāneśwar, ‘as you are my guru, let me sit at your blessed feet so that I may worship you and imbibe fully your teachings.’

And so it came to pass, as one says in stories that happened long long ago, that the elder child initiated his little brother in the mystery of unfathomable Brahman and the whole universe.

What passed between them can best be assessed by their own lives and teachings.

Let us linger a while yet near the Udumbara tree as the river mists slowly rise and the light of Jñāneśwar’s eyes seems to

brighten while day is already on the threshold. And so, the inner Light of Knowledge blazed forth in tune with the newly risen sun illuminating the world. Placing his forehead tenderly on his brother’s feet, Jñāneśwar with tears of love streaming down his adoring face, worshipped Nivr̥tti with all his heart.

A few days later it was Jñāneśwar’s turn to initiate his younger brother Sopāna and sister Mukṭā. Sopāna must have been over six and little Mukṭā four or five, yet such was their inner strength and grasp of spiritual Truths combined with the holy background of their upbringing, that these successive initiations passed the sacred knowledge as from one lamp to another with ease and conviction that left no place or corner vacant for the stealing in of darkness or doubt.

Their parents were Viṭṭhala Pant and Rakhumāi, Brahmins from Apegaon and Alandi. Due to a misunderstanding between Viṭṭhala Pant and his guru, the great Rāmānanda of Kashi, he was forced to relinquish sannyāsa and return to the life of a householder which he had long since renounced. Such unprecedented behaviour in times of Brahminical influence was instrumental in the whole family becoming ostracized. Nivr̥tti was born in 1273 and Jñāneśwar in 1275. The irate pandits of Alandi adamantly refused Viṭṭhala Pant permission to initiate his sons in the ways of Brahminhood; in other words, to enable them to wear the sacred thread. Finally, moved by his humble supplications, they relented and referred him to the more learned pandits of Pratisthana (Paithan). So the little family in their peregrinations came to settle down for a while at Tryambakeswar on the banks of the Godāvarī.

1. A type of fig tree, *Ficus glomerata*.

It was during one of their peregrinations on the Brahmagiri before daylight, that a tiger suddenly pounced on the little group, scattering them in all directions. Nivṛtti, the eldest boy, fled into the recesses of the mountain, losing his way so completely that he chanced to enter a deep cave where an enchanting sight met his eyes. In the dancing lights of wood and cowdung fires, he saw humans and animals mingling in undisturbed harmony. Was he not greeted by a tiger similar to the one that had given them such fright? The big cat lay sprawled at the feet of some yogī lost in deep meditation. Back to back were deer and panthers, birds of all kinds and even snakes coiled peacefully round pillars of branches. Nivṛtti approached cautiously and discovered from one of the anchorites moving about the place that the yogī in meditation was their guru Gainināth, a disciple of Gorakṣanāth. The yogī opened his eyes and looked reflectively at the shy young boy who seemed transparent with purity and vibrant with the inner forces of introspection and self-discipline. The boy stood as it were at the very gates of the arduous path of Self-realization.

‘Come here, child ; who are you and how did you come here?’ said the yogī.

Most humbly Nivṛtti fell at his feet and related the events that brought him there. The yogī smiled and assured him that his coming was no accident, for his guru had correctly predicted it and urged him to initiate Nivṛtti, demanding that in turn Nivṛtti should initiate his brother Jñāneśwar who was destined to bring salvation to many.

When the perfect guru meets the right disciple, time is no factor in imparting knowledge. Within eight days Nivṛtti learnt all that there was to know. All four heavenly children were indeed ready to receive that pure knowledge of yoga. It was already ingrained in their soul, and the act of initiation was actually the reveal-

ing or rekindling of that existing fire of Truth.

When their parents saw that all their children shone with the inner effulgence of Self-realization, radiating love that is divine, they left them to proceed to Prayag (Allahabad) at the confluence of the three sacred rivers, where they offered their lives to the One unchangeable Infinite.

This left the children free to wander where the will of God took them, so they headed for Pratisthana. After rescuing the children from exhaustion, the pandits of the sacred city confronted them with a haughty rebuttal of their claims, and the priests refused to give them the letter of purification from their parent’s sins. There ensued an argument with the children until Jñāneśwar quoted the Vedas to the great irritation of the head priest, who snapped : ‘Do not trifle with the Vedas for you are all out-castes !’ But Jñāneśwar patiently argued that the Vedas were being misinterpreted and that all creatures were free to recite them. Even the heavy he-buffalo passing by the temple gates was no exception. Amidst loud guffaws, the Brahmins ordered the buffalo to be brought into the assembly hall and then with incredulous stares asked the fearless boy standing humbly before them whether the animal possessed that knowledge. Jñāneśwar without any hesitation assured them that it was so, for the Self indeed was manifest in the whole universe whether consciously or unconsciously. The Brahmins roared with laughter and said : ‘Well, let the buffalo recite the Vedas!’ Still unruffled, Jñāneśwar appealed to the Divine within the beast and spoke to him softly, gently stroking his forehead. The boy began to recite a passage in the *R̥g-Veda* which describes the sacred letter *Aum*, and from then on, the buffalo took over and chanted the *R̥g-Veda* in a deep and sonorous voice.

The heart of the pandits underwent an instant change, and while true introspec-

tion caused them at first to remain glued to their seats they suddenly rose as one man and humbly prostrated and surrendered to the slender feet of the child they now regarded as Divine Knowledge incarnate.

Censure and praise did not affect the young ones. They accepted both in their serene way and then proceeded on their journey and settled for some years in a village called Nevase where Jñāneśwar, still in his early teens, composed his Marathi translation of the *Gītā* with his own original commentaries, and other immortal works of philosophy such as the *Amṛtānubhava*, as well as verses of pure enraptured love of God. Seldom has one so young been seen to achieve and combine the sublime goals of knowledge and devotion at one and the same time. It seems as if Jñāneśwar swam freely in both currents and so proved them to be one. In fact all the four children did the same with the greatest ease. True to his humble nature, Jñāneśwar attributed his success and achievements entirely to the grace of his guru Nivṛtti.

Meanwhile the Alandi Brahmins also underwent a change in their attitude to the holy family and in sincere repentance begged them to return to their homeland. Once in Alandi, they made several more disciples including a formidable yogī said to be 1400 years old who practiced Haṭha-Yoga, by which he renewed his body cells at regular intervals. Chāṅgadeva, as he was called, gave up his arrogance and supernatural powers and meekly accepted young Mukṭā as his guru.

We must remember also that in Maharashtra of seven centuries ago, two main thought-currents were predominant among the masses: that of the Nāthas and the other, the Vārkarī Saṁpradāya of the devotees of the Viṭṭhala of Pandharpur. Jñāneśwar was quick to sense the need of the illiterate villagers, their constant yearning for a personal God they could feel as their own and confide in. Whatever they got from religion

came through the mouths of pandits who spoke as they pleased, since none else knew Sanskrit. Jñāneśwar brought them the *Gītā* in their own language and embellished it with such vivid commentaries as charmed his audience wherever he taught. He named his work the *Bhāvārtha Dipikā*, later known as the *Jñāneśwarī*. This was followed by the *Amṛtānubhava*, a treatise expounding his own philosophy, as subtle and profound as his own heart.

The young ones made several pilgrimages to the sacred city of Pandharpur where they mingled with other saints and encouraged the popular feelings of devotion to a God who was both personal and impersonal, who was their constant friend and yet was everywhere in all things. The other saints, who numbered over a score, were no less worthy of admiration. They all had their trials and tribulations and came out of the fire ordeal unscathed, with their faith intact. Most of them belonged to the lower castes or were even outcastes. This did not prevent them from realizing the truth of Vedantic Oneness which they achieved without the least effort or tuition. All they knew was complete surrender to God, and that act itself opened the door to the knowledge of the Self.

Does this not go to prove that the paths of knowledge and devotion converge into one through the sincerity of the devotee?

Their matchless verses (*abhaṅgas*) proclaim ceaselessly the fact that 'O Lord, Thou art ever One, not two !' (*dūjā nāhī!*). Even the little maidservant of Nāmadeva, the saint Janābāi, declares the same in all her songs overflowing with pure love of Pāṇduranga, (Kṛṣṇa). So did the *māli* (gardener) Sāwatā: 'Thou art the well, the ropes, the bucket and the bullocks and the water flowing in peace to the blossoming plants which Thou art !'

Kānhopātrā, the courtesan turned devotee of later centuries, cries to her Lord: 'The devotees are but your other forms.'

Nāmadeva the tailor left his meal to chase a dog who had stolen a piece of bread from his plate, exclaiming : 'O Lord, please take this ghee too, lest your stomach ache after eating dry bread.'

This innate conviction of the Oneness of the Universal Spirit singles out the Maharashtra devotees as a class of their own, far above the concept of dualism. Besides, they all shared the same humility, the same love of God and of all his devotees, nay, of all creation. They all renounced every desire for worldly possessions and attained complete unattachment. Neither were they given to ostentatiousness or spectacular fits like epileptics. They led quite normal lives.

They were the most perfect combination of Jñāna and Bhakti, which they practised every moment of their lives. True yogīs par excellence. Apart from a few like Jñāneśwar and his family, they were all householders.

Jñāneśwar was chosen unanimously the leader of the Vārkarīs, the devotees of Viṭṭhala (otherwise known as Pāṇḍuraṅga). His deep philosophy never clashed with his teachings on Bhakti, a similarity with the great Śaṅkarācārya. Those devotees had no inkling of differences between castes and creeds. Śiva was extolled as much as Viṣṇu, both merged into the One same Divinity. Their pure hearts were utterly free from petty bigotry, pride, lust, envy and other mind-shrinking feelings.

Saint Jñāneśwar and Saint Nāmadeva found joy in each other's company and became close friends. They were the first proponents of the Hari Saṅkīrtana or the mass singing of the names of God. It is still remembered in South India where every Kīrtana begins with due salutation and respect to these two saints.

When he approached his twenties, Jñāneśwar left for a pilgrimage to the North, accompanied by his faithful friends

Nāmadeva and other saints. They preached as far off as Punjab.

On their return, there were great rejoicings in Pandharpur where Kīrtanas rocked the temple with the force of unison. It was the high tide of an ocean of joy with devotees and saints dancing in waves of bliss. By that time not only Pandharpur but the whole of Maharashtra burst forth like a forest of flowers as Kīrtanas swayed villages and towns with the compulsive force of their dancing and singing the blessed names of God to their heart's content. Maharashtra resounded thus with the purifying names of 'Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Hari Viṭṭhala Pāṇḍuraṅga !' to which they danced in complete abandon of worldly cares, without awareness of the physical world, totally intoxicated with the bliss of the Lord.

No one today can even picture in their mind the bliss of what these Kīrtanas must have been when one recalls that they were conducted and attended by scores of fully Self-realized saints ! God's name rose like a lion's roar invading the whole firmament. It transformed, it revived and bathed the entire universe in peace and flooded it with pure love. Blessed, blessed is indeed Maharashtra to have nurtured these great souls at one and the same time !

It was after such a Kīrtana that Jñāneśwar confided in his friend Nāmadeva that the time had come for him to leave this world. The news so stunned Nāmadeva that he was unable to comprehend. Jñāneśwar who had always been his friend, his support, to leave them all, just like that? His mute entreaty could not shake the young yogī's resolve. 'No, Nāmyā, I have completed all the work I had come to do and now I must leave this body by wilful Samādhi at Alandi.'

Nāmadeva's tears brought together all the devotees who joined their entreaties to Nāmadeva's. Nāmadeva felt that even Pāṇḍuraṅga expressed his sorrow at such a young life about to be forsaken. But

Jñāneśwar soothingly and ever so gently gave them hope in the serenity of the Infinite. 'Let Pāṇḍuraṅga keep you and guide you. Don't grieve, I shall only leave my body. I shall always be with you.'

They had to bow to the inevitable and to the will of God who worked through them in His mysterious ways. Nāmadeva left us eyewitness accounts of these events, as well as biographies of other saints. His rendering of Jñāneśwar's departure from this world is so moving, his pangs of separation so deep that one cannot remain unmoved by his heart-rending verses.

There must have been millions of devotees and saints present at Alandi where the fasting crowds regaled themselves with five days and nights of uninterrupted Kīrtanas. The river Indrāyaṇī seemed to overflow her banks with delight.

Then, on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Kārtika (November-December), Jñāneśwar bathed and put on the new ochre cloth (gerua). They marked his body with auspicious signs and slowly and tenderly led him to the final resting place of his youthful body. Yes, he was barely twenty-one ! The pit had been dug to the left of the Siddheśwar temple, at the foot of an Anjana [Ājāna?] tree. They spread a deerskin, relates Nāmadeva, and showered fragrant petals.

The incessant singing and dancing went on, radiating joy around Jñāneśwar. Yet Nāmadeva, Sopāna and Mukṭā could not forget their grief and pangs of agony at the coming separation. Nāmadeva could not bear to look at the freshly dug pit without feeling the loss of him on whom he had come to depend so much. 'O Jñānoba, you have been our father and mother. How shall life go on without you?'

Accompanied by the saints, Jñāneśwar worshipped at the Śiva temple (Siddheśwar) and Nāmadeva poured the sanctified flowers in his hands. Then, as Kīrtanas redoubled in power and the name of Govinda rent

the air, the heavens seemed to add heavenly Vīṇās and Mṛdaṅgas.² Walking in front of the two elder brothers were Sopāna and Mukṭā. Jñāneśwar embraced each in turn and Nāmadeva, who was too upset to utter a word, silently wept on his friend's breast. The singing of Hari's name continued unabated. 'Alas,' cried Nāmadeva as tears rolled down his face, 'my heart is suffering unbearable torments !'

Jñāneśwar stood in their midst like a moonbeam of tender light, bowing to them all in humble leave-taking. Nāmadeva, Mukṭā and others threw themselves sobbing at his feet in a futile effort at dissuading him. Jñāneśwar now could do no more than hand them all over to the care of Śrī Viṭṭhala, and with an infinite smile of love gave them assurance that he indeed would always remain their all in all.

With the assent of Nivṛtti, Jñāneśwar slowly descended to the waiting āsana (seat). After bowing to all the directions, he sat there, his hands in *abhaya mudrā*³ resting on his lap. With his mind fixed in one single purpose, he concentrated on the rise of the Kuṇḍalinī Śakti (power). Stage by stage the serpentine power rose and crossed the six *cakras* (psychic centres), abandoning them no sooner it awakened them; and finally piercing the Brahmarandhra, or top of the head, he merged where he had always belonged, in the formless state of the Self. Cries of 'Glory to Jñāneśwar !' resounded on all sides while Kīrtanas never ceased and flowers fell in showers upon him. With tears in their eyes, the villagers rolled a heavy slab of stone and closed the aperture for ever.

Nivṛtti, Sopāna, Mukṭā and Chāṅgadeva also abandoned their mortal coil within a year of Jñāneśwar's becoming one with Brahman.

2. The Vīṇā is a kind of stringed musical instrument. The Mṛdanga is a type of double drum.

3. A kind of hand gesture in the Tantra literature assuring fearlessness.

UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA* —XII

To Sister Christine

63

The Math, Belur, Dist. Howrah,
15th May 1902.

My dear Christine,

So glad to learn you like Mayavati.³⁵ The heat here is come in earnest, and no rain. I drink very little water though.

I have given up all idea of going to Mayavati or Almora. I bear the heat well, but the rains here are to be avoided. I will remove to somewhere else then.

No news from Calcutta. I am in a hurry. Write me the details of whatever you see or feel there about men and things.

Yours with all love,
VIVEKANANDA.

64

The Math, Belur, Dist. Howrah,
27th May 1902.

My dear Christine,

I am sorry I could not visit the mountains this time. My health, though not improved as much as I wished, is not bad. The liver has been benefited—is a great gain. The rains will commence very soon in the hills. So it is useless for me to take all the trouble of that terrible route.

I am so happy to learn the mountains are doing you good. Eat a lot, sleep as much as you can, and get plump. Stuff yourself till you get plump or you burst.

So the place did not suit Mr. Okakura ; why? There must have been something to annoy him very much, that he left the place so abruptly. Did he not like the scenery—was not it sublime enough for him? Or the Japanese do not like sublimity at all, they only like beauty?

One of the boys writes that the little boy is getting disobedient etc. Mrs. Sevier wants me to take him down. So I do. I have asked Sadananda and another monk (whom I want for work here) to go to Almora and wait for the monsoon, and when it breaks, to come down.

* © The President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

35. After landing in Bombay, Sister Christine had gone to Calcutta on April 7 ; and from there she had proceeded to Mayavati, arriving on May 10 in the company of Swamis Sadananda and Subodhananda, Suren (Swamiji's nephew) and Gangi Sah. On the 13th, Sister Nivedita, Miss Bett, Mr. Okakura and his servant had joined them at Mayavati.

If you feel you are becoming least burdensome to Mrs. Sevier, write me immediately. It would be a sin to put further pressure on her—she does so much for me. However, she likes you very much, and writes that you look be-au-ti-f in sarees.

I have just now two kids and three lambs added to the family. There was one more kid: but he got himself drowned in the yellow fish-tank. How is Margot? Is she still there? Or gone away with Mr. Okakura? How is she pulling on with the boys?

What do you do the whole day—how do you pass the day? Write me all details, and frequently; but do not expect long letters from me often.

Give my love to Mrs. Sevier, to Margot and the rest, and you may take a few spoonfuls if you like

with only this,
VIVEKANANDA.

PS—Have an eye over the little chap. The boys are already jealous of him. They did spoil another boy that way before.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Ācārya Śaṅkara through His Gītā-Commentary—II (Editorial): In the first instalment of the Editorial Śaṅkara's views regarding Karma-Kāṇḍa, Karma-Yoga and *karma-sannyāsa* were studied in brief in the light of his commentary on the *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā*. In this instalment, his views regarding the Rāja, Bhakti and Jñāna Yogas, as well as the Avatāra and Avatāra-worship, and his attitude towards dualism and qualified non-dualism, have been discussed in the light of his *Gītā*-commentary. It is hoped that this deliberation will help to some extent in removing the misconceptions about the great Ācārya, and will reveal his magnanimous heart.

First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna—Aghoramani Devi: Amongst the women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the name of Aghoramani Devi, or 'Gopaler Ma', is well known. She used to regard Sri Ramakrishna as 'Gopala' (child Krishna), and the Master in turn had a filial attitude towards her. Sister Nivedita took care of her at 17 Bose-

para Lane, Calcutta, for about two and a half years, till she passed away on July 8, 1906. The Sister wrote about her: 'I feel thrilled, for I believe that Gopaler Ma's sainthood is as great as that of Paramahansa. For in her was such motherhood that the heart of Ramakrishna became a child to her.' In this brief life-sketch, Swami Prabhananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia, Bihar, India, has told, in addition to the story of her first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, many hitherto unknown facts which he has investigated as a result of his untiring research work on the subject.

Aging and Evolution: 'Aging' is something which a living being cannot avoid, because metabolism and katabolism are unavoidable facts of nature. For a majority of human beings aging creates more problems, physical and psychological, in life, and many even become fed up with living and feel the earlier they close their eyes the better. In this thought-provoking

treatise Swami Vidyatmananda of the Centre Védantique Ramakrichna, Gretz, France, has very lucidly put his reflections before the reader. He says: 'We cannot triumph over the disagreeable fact of aging. Then why not turn our decline into a benefit? Co-operate with aging which, like an exacting teacher, will force and cajole us into doing what it is to our own best interest to do. In acting thus we are fostering our own evolution.'

Dīrghatamas—the Vedic Philosopher : It is a prevalent belief that Vedantic thought is restricted only to the Upaniṣads—the end portion of the Vedas; and the students of Vedanta are mainly conversant with names like Yājñavalkya, Āruṇi, Uddālaka, and others, which occur in the Upaniṣads. Hardly do they know that even in the ritualistic portions of the Vedas are found traces of Vedantic thought and the names of some great Vedantic thinkers like Dīrghatamas. In this learned article, Dr. S. A. Dange, Reader, Department of Sanskrit, University of Bombay, Bombay, has very beautifully narrated his views about the contribution of Dīrghatamas to Vedantic thought. He is of the opinion that 'Dīrghatamas has clearly influenced the philosophic thought of the Upaniṣads.'

Śrī Jñāneśwar—the Saint of Maharashtra : Jñāneśwar is one of the brilliant stars in the galaxy of saints of Maharashtra, India, who has made a mark on the religious philosophy of the province. Born in the thirteenth century, he wrote a beautiful commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in Marathi, and other highly philosophical works like *Amṛtānubhava* and *Chāṅgadeva-Pāsaṣṭi*, when he was in his teens. In this article Srimati Savitribai Khanolkar, a deep student of Maharashtrian saints, has told in brief the remarkable and eventful life-story of Saint Jñāneśwar. The author, although European by birth, has become completely Maharashtrianized after her marriage with the late Major General V. R. Khanolkar. Sometime in 1938, Mrs. Khanolkar became a disciple of Swami Abhedananda (the direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna). She often writes in the *Bhavan's Journal*, and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan of Bombay has undertaken to publish her book on the 'Saints of Maharashtra'.

Unpublished Letters of Swami Vivekananda—XII : We are publishing in this issue Swami Vivekananda's letters to Sister Christine from 15 May 1902 to 27 May 1902.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SRI GARIB DAS—HARYANA'S SAINT OF HUMANITY: BY K. C. GUPTA, Publishers : Impex India, 2/18 Ansari Road, New Delhi, 110 002, 1976, pp. xx+216, Price : Rs. 40/-, \$ 8.00.

Here is a fine study on the life and work of Sri Garib Das, an eighteenth century saint of Haryana, written with a historical and critical perspective. The author devotes two chapters to the environment in which Garib Das lived and worked, namely, 'The Origin and Development of the Bhakti Movement', and 'The Political, Social

and Religious Conditions'. Garib Das was born in Rohtak District and lived and worked mostly in Chhudani, about thirty miles from Delhi. He composed some 18,000 verses in Haryanavi, Punjabi, Western Hindi and Sant Bhasha. They deal with religious truth, true religious life, and the brotherhood of all—Hindus, Muslims, and others—in the unity of God. This *bāṇi* (teachings) of Garib Das has been constituted into a *Granth Sahib* and is revered by his followers as the Sikhs do theirs. This sect has some 110 Deras (places of residence) and Kutias (huts) in Haryana, Punjab, U.P., Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The author has dealt in two chapters with the contribution of Garib Das to language, literature and poetry. Two chapters are devoted to showing the pervasive influence of Kabir and to a lesser extent that of *Adi Granth* of the Sikhs on Garib Das's thought. One chapter analyses his philosophy and religion. In these respects the general Hindu concepts form the background of all these sects, reinforced by the trend of the Bhakti movement which inculcates liberalization of caste, equality of man and love of God. Following the Nirguna school of Bhakti, he is opposed to image worship.

The book is well written and numerous quotations are given in Nagari from the Granth of Garib Das with full or partial English translation to substantiate the views expressed. The printing and get-up are good. A few mistakes have appeared here and there. The word idolatry is consistently spelt 'idolatory'. In footnotes on page two, *Vivekachudamani* is wrongly spelt; footnote two must be *Bhagavata* and not *Bhagavad-Gita*; footnote three must be *Tātparyanirnaya*.

Now when India is launched on gathering up her scattered spiritual forces to issue forth in a mighty flood all over the world, such attempts to bring to light the significant contributions of great saints are to be welcomed and it is hoped many such saints will be lifted out of obscurity.

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA
Ramakrishna Math, Belur, W.B.

SURYA—THE SUN GOD : BY DR. MRS. SHAKTI M. GUPTA, Publishers : Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 172 Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar, Bombay, 400 014, 1977, pp. xvi+108, Rs. 55/-.

The book, with a Foreword by C. Sivaramamurti, is an exhaustive treatise on Surya, the Sun God, in all his aspects. With thirty-six brilliant plates covering temples all over India, the author has done an excellent job in treating Surya's different manifestations since ancient times. In four chapters she has dealt with the mythical and historical background, the Sun temples in India, the attendant deities of Surya and myths about Surya, with great skill and real scholarship.

Dr. Shakti M. Gupta has brought together mythology and history in this brilliant account of the Sun God in all his glory and splendour. A botanist, novelist, research scholar in ancient Indian mythology and a prolific writer, the author very correctly points out, 'The Sun was identified with the vital principle in man and in cosmos'

(p. 1), was worshipped in India, Iran, Egypt, the Middle East and Far East, Australia and Mexico. The giver of light and life, the Sun will always be held in great esteem as in the past, because it is the vital principle of life. It enlightens our intellect.

There are some printing mistakes which should be removed in future editions, and it should be provided with a useful Index. With these necessary modifications it can be considered an excellent account of the Sun God and a complete store-house of all information about this deity. We recommend the book to scholars and lay readers alike without reserve.

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LITERATURE AND REVELATION : BY MOHAN SINGH UBEROI DIWANA, Publisher : Dr. Mohan Singh, Premjitniwas, 310, Sector 15-A, Chandigarh, 1977, pp. 12+87, Price : Rs. 7.50.

Those who have read in the large and varied corpus of Mohan Singh's writings knew him to be essentially a mystic, a person with *divya dr̥ṣṭi*, and it is this which permeates the present essay as well. Indeed, the purpose of his writing this booklet is 'to understand God, His solicitude, for His creation, His will to maintain His standards of justice, mercy, equality, compassion, honesty, nobility, integrity—all His attributes.' For this purpose Mohan Singh turns to the Bible, for he maintains that 'no other single work has helped me understand the operative God—who operates in time and space, in history and philosophy... as much as the vast canvas of the Holy Bible where there is enough of context and background and foreground for the sayings of the Lord which carry their own authenticity, validity and external contemporaneousness.'

By the use of illuminating parallels from other religious traditions—and here Mohan Singh shows himself to be a widely read scholar—the author has sought to expose the essence of the Bible as a revelation of the universal Spirit which has expressed itself in all the religious traditions of mankind. The result is in a real sense an exercise in the yoga of self-discovery in which the yogi achieves a sense of unity and continuity of the eternal spirit from himself through all cultures, languages, literatures and religions. The exercise and the achievements are by no means unique, but the description of the experience of this modern *r̥ṣi*, a poet par excellence, is a profound delight, a real feast of the spirit.

The booklet is a brilliant exercise in serendipity, but I found its argument rather arbitrary and irritatingly muddled. For one thing the author, for whom the world of poetic myth is the 'real' world, is not using the same language as the man for whom the world of scientifically objective fact is the 'real' world. Each of them, preferably both, must not only learn to translate the other's speech into his own 'language'; each must also learn to recognize, for what they are, the unconscious preconceptions which he takes for granted, but which the other does not share.

Just as great a gulf as that separates for example the Hindu, who has been 'formed' by the belief that ultimate Reality is an *indivisible unity* in which all awareness of an 'other' is an illusion, from the Jew or the Christian, whose Biblical understanding of God has 'formed' him to find supreme significance in *relationship* because relationship belongs to the eternal order, not merely to the temporal.

In short, Mohan Singh does not fully recognize the difference between one system of meanings and explanations and another, between one 'formation' and another. The real problem is that we cannot disagree, for disagreement assumes a common language of discourse and a set of common assumptions. When these are absent, any real meeting of minds, and thus both agreement and disagreement are impossible. To create a common language would be a large step forward, but before we can take it we must take three steps backwards.

The first step is to recognize that the various religious traditions are speaking different languages. The second is for each to 'translate' what the other is saying into his own language so that it becomes intelligible and perhaps also creditable. The third step is for each to identify certain unconscious assumptions in our thinking, on the basis of which each says that something is, or is not, real. Indeed, the optimism of this essay with regard to the possibilities of discovering the universal and eternal Spirit in various religious traditions is bound to be unrealistic unless it is first grounded in a much more radical pessimism.

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MARATHI

MANA ANI TYACHA NIGRAHA : BY
SWAMI BUDHANANDA, TRANSLATED BY DR. NAREN-
DRANATH B. PATIL ; Publishers: Sri Dattatreya M.
Dahanukar Trust, Bombay, 1977 ; Sole Distribu-

tors : Bombay Book Depot, Girgaum, Bombay,
400 004, pp. 8+97, Price : Rs. 5/-.

In this modern world of science and technology, man is ever running after pleasures of the senses. He has no time to look within and see for himself what is wrong with his mind. In spite of all the pleasurable things at his command, he has no satisfaction. He struggles for mental peace and cannot get it. Why? The reason is that he is often torn between the twin potent forces of lust and gold. It is the sublime duty of the spiritually experienced to hold the light for such struggling souls and enable them to understand the functioning of their minds. Swami Budhananda has really rendered a great service to all such aspirants by writing this manual on 'Mind and its Control'. The original English book has been translated into lucid Marathi by Dr. Narendranath B. Patil, the Deputy Director of Languages, Bombay, and is useful for those who have no access to the original on account of the language barrier.

It is a common experience that during the course of one's life, the moments of happiness are few and far between. The human mind is at the back of all happiness and sorrow. This has been proved time and again, both empirically and rationally by all the stalwarts of Hindu philosophy. The scriptural statements, like 'The mind alone is the cause of man's bondage as well as freedom—*Mana eva manuṣyāṇām kāraṇam bandha-mokṣayoh*' and 'The self alone is verily the friend of the Self, and that very self is the enemy of the Self—*Atmaiva hyātmano bandhur-ātmaiva ripurātmanah*', emphasize this basic aspect of mind. That is why Bhagavan Sri Krishna has unequivocally stated that He is the mind among the senses—*indriyāṇām manascāsmi*. The Hindu philosophers belonging to various creeds have studied the human mind in its different aspects. They have by their personal experience shown the paths of eternal happiness. The author belongs to the Order of Sri Ramakrishna and therefore there is a ring of authenticity in whatever he has written. He has elucidated the subject by quoting copiously from the scriptures and from the biographies of great saints. Although small in size, the book serves as an epitome of this subject. The last chapter gives concisely the outline of the subject, and the notes appended are helpful for further study.

The nature of the mind has been detailed in the first few chapters. The fifth chapter is very important as it contains an analysis of the mind according to the Hindus. Digression and concentration are the seemingly contradictory charac-

teristics of the mind. Various methods have been suggested for collecting the scattered thoughts and for making the mind sharp and pointed. The study is useful in reducing the stresses and strains of day to day life. Development of will-power, discrimination, association with saints, external and internal control of mind through bodily postures, breathing and meditation have been prescribed in subsequent chapters. Although the Swami has laid great stress on the devotional aspect of worship, he has also suggested other methods of mind control for non-believers.

The control of mind is the basic requirement for a spiritual, moral and religious life. A human being needs to be cultured at both levels—personal and institutional. The present book would prove useful in homes as well as in schools and colleges for building up healthy human personalities. Both the author and the translator deserve congratulations for their endeavour.

PROF. B. R. DESHPANDE, *Nagpur*

SANSKRIT

SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITAM
—PRATHAMO BHAGAH : BY 'M'; TRANSLATED BY SWAMI DHYANATMANANDA AND OTHERS, Publishers : Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia, Calcutta, 700 056, 1976, pp. xiii+49+157, with 17 plates, Price : Rs. 20/-.

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, the ambrosial conversations of Sri Ramakrishna, the great spiritual genius of the modern age (1836-86), were recorded meticulously at first hand by Mahendra Nath Gupta during the years 1882 to 1886, whenever he was present, and were published by him in the Bengali language in five volumes under the pseudonym 'M'. The style of presentation, describing the scenes of the conversations, date and time; the reproduction of the very language of the Master and his ecstatic moods; the variety of spiritual subjects which formed the topics; the sublimity of thoughts imbued with the per-

sonal realizations of the great Master, and the moving songs and imageries, recreate and bring the events alive before the readers' eyes. No wonder the *Kathamrita* became highly popular and a source of inspiration immediately, and was translated into several Indian languages. Its English translation by Swami Nikhilananda in 1942 in New York, under the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was immediately welcomed all over the world and was considered a great religious classic, and translations are appearing in other languages of the world as well.

Sanskrit, with its hoary past, is the pre-eminent language for conveying religious and spiritual ideas in India. In it are couched all the country's great scriptures and religious works. It is but meet that this great work should also find a place among the gems of that language. Here is the first part of the translation covering the year 1882. The other volumes, for the years 1883-86, are expected to appear in due course. Since the work is famous and familiar to most, nothing need be said about its contents beyond what has already been said. The Sanskrit rendering was done by a Committee of three—Swami Dhyanatmananda, Secretary of the publishing institution, Pandit Vidhubhushan Bhattacharya of Jadavpur University, and Prof. Jnanendra Chandra Datta of the Calcutta Women's College. The language is simple, elegant, modern, and makes pleasant reading. As far as possible *sandhis* have been avoided and anyone with a little knowledge of Sanskrit can read easily and derive benefit and joy.

The printing and get-up are excellent, with seventeen illustrations on art paper of persons and places associated with Sri Ramakrishna. A useful glossary is added at the end. The *shuddhi patra* (errata slip) corrects the few mistakes that have crept in printing.

We recommend the book to all lovers of Sanskrit.

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, NEW DELHI

REPORT : APRIL 1976—MARCH 1977

From an humble beginning in 1927, the Ashrama has become an important centre of physical, intellectual and spiritual help to the citizens of the Union Territory of Delhi.

Religious Work : During the year under review, the Centre endeavoured to broadcast the

teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through regular classes, Sunday discourses and occasional lectures. Bengali classes were held on *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* on the first Wednesday of each month, and on the *Bhagavad-Gita* on the other Wednesdays; the latter was mainly for the Sarada Mahila Samiti (a local organization of women), though earnest

devotees could also attend by permission. Weekly discourses were held in Hindi on *Sri Ramacharit-Manas*. Occasionally the monastic members of the Centre were invited to speak before various organizations in and outside of Delhi.

The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda were celebrated on a large scale, and the birthdays of other great Saints and Incarnations were also observed appropriately; Ramanam Sankirtanam was held every Ekadashi day; and in addition to daily worship, facilities were provided for meditation and Bhajan in the temple.

Educational Work: The Centre maintains a Library and Reading Room, which have been growing steadily. During the year the daily average attendance was 409; and 1,007 new books were added, bringing the total number to 28,459. The Reading Room received 15 newspapers and 115 periodicals. A separate section for children is also maintained.

Since 1962, the Centre has run a University Students' Section Library, assisted financially by the University of Delhi. During the year, 517 students, both girls and boys, were admitted as members. On an average, 107 students used the library daily, borrowing 426 books. The library had 4,964 textbooks.

In 1958 the Centre started a moral and cultural programme for the benefit of children of the age group 6 to 14 years, by imparting cultural and moral education. The classes are held on Sunday mornings from 9 to 10 with the active help of the Sarada Mahila Samiti. An average of 35 children attended the classes, which consist of Bhajans, story-telling and so on.

Medical: The Centre runs a Free Tuberculosis Clinic, which holds the distinction of being the first institution in Delhi to fight the scourge in an organized way; and it is still the only non-official institution of its kind in the Union Territory of Delhi.

The Clinic has full facilities for diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis in all its aspects including surgery. It is equipped with: an observation ward with 28 beds, equally divided between male and female patients; two X-ray units; a Clinical Laboratory with facilities for routine bacteriological examinations, including specialized examination such as culture of sputum; an Operation Theatre with the necessary instruments and appliances for bronchoscopy, thoracoscopy, minor chest surgery and so on; and provision to treat patients at home under the Domiciliary Service Scheme prior to admission and after discharge from the Hospital. Milk and tiffin

were supplied free to all free-ward indoor patients. Costly medicines like antibiotics were supplied free to them and also to all out-patients whose monthly income was less than Rs. 300/-. During the period under review, 2,619 patients received these medicines.

The number of outdoor cases treated in the Clinic during the year was 16,908 (2,35,104 repeated cases), of which 2,517 were new. In addition, 233 indoor cases were treated in the observation wards.

The Outdoor Free Homoeopathic Dispensary has been serving the local community, especially the poorer section, since its inception in 1929. During the year, it treated 72,085 cases, of which 5,432 were new.

Narayana Seva: This was held on Sunday, 13 March 1977. About 410 children whose parents suffer from leprosy were served with sumptuous meals at the Children's Home for Boys in Delhi. Before the feeding, the children participated in Bhajans, and a monk of the Ramakrishna Order spoke to them in Hindi. About 215 inmates of Nirmal Hriday, a home for the destitute, were also served with cooked food on the same day.

Charity: The Centre has endeavoured over the years to render whatever possible help it can afford, to deserving men and women by giving charitable monetary assistance and/or articles of personal need. Occasional help has been given to school and college students for educational and vocational studies, and to others towards medical relief, cremation expenses and other essential needs. The total expenditure under this solely charitable service during the year was Rs. 9,322.91.

Immediate Needs: In order to enable the Centre to continue its ministrations to the community, the sympathetic public is requested to donate generously for the following requirements: For the Free Tuberculosis Clinic—(a) endowment for the maintenance of each free bed, Rs. 30,000; (b) laboratory instruments, Rs. 10,000. For the Ashrama—(a) urgently needed additional water supply, Rs. 25,000; (b) five steel almirahs for storage of records, etc., Rs. 6,000; (c) renovation of the electrical system Rs. 10,000. For social and cultural works—(a) needed improvements in the Auditorium's acoustics and public address system, Rs. 15,000; (b) 16 mm movie film projector, Rs. 8,000; (c) slide projector, Rs. 3,000.

Donations may be sent to: The Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg, New Delhi 110 055. All contributions are exempt from Income-Tax.